

We Hold These Treasures: Christian Families Sharing Our Gifts

A CFM Program



*Christian
Family
Movement*



We Hold These Treasures

*An Inquiry Book
Published by the
Christian Family Movement*

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Introduction

“Much will be required of the person entrusted with much, and still more will be demanded of the person entrusted with more.” Luke 12:48

This program guide for CFM members covers a diversity of issues, both in and outside of the family, with the central theme of Stewardship. God has blessed us with many gifts, especially in this country. This guide leads us to explore our responsibilities with respect to these gifts. We discuss how God is the source of all our gifts and the source of all grace needed to live our lives as Christian disciples and stewards of all that God has given us.

Chapter 1: Stewardship is essentially an expression of discipleship. The foundation for the life of a steward is one’s relationship with Jesus Christ, which flows from God’s grace in the sacraments of initiation. The commitment and ability to live a life of stewardship comes out of our love for Jesus Christ.

Chapter 2: To serve God and do his will in our lives, we need to be good stewards of the bodies, minds and souls that God has given us. We honor God with every aspect of our being: physical, intellectual, emotional and spiritual. When we take care of our minds and bodies and, most importantly, strengthen ourselves spiritually, we are better able to serve God and others.

Chapter 3: In addition to natural talents, God has given each baptized person spiritual gifts to be used for the building up of the Body of Christ. Spiritual gifts from God always are given for the benefit of others and to continue the mission of Jesus.

Chapter 4: Simplifying our lives will bring us closer to God. Removing the attachments we have to “stuff” and our personal schedules frees us up to live the life that God has willed for us.

Chapter 5: Living in family life is a calling, a vocation, and it is sometimes difficult. Recognizing that our spouse and children are gifts given to us for only a time, we are called to treasure and nurture them, being concerned for them as for our very selves.

Chapter 6: As Christians, we have a responsibility to care for others, especially the less fortunate. Catholic teaching on Justice and Solidarity instructs us as to why we are responsible for others and what we can do to help improve the lives of others.

Chapter 7: The beauty of nature often inspires us and raises our hearts to God. As stewards of the earth and its bountiful resources, we are called to protect and preserve the earth for the good of people living today and for the benefit of future generations, a responsibility that includes an awareness of how environmental changes are impacting the various peoples of the world, especially the poor and those who are most vulnerable.

Chapter 8: Growing as a Christian steward is a journey and process of formation and maturation, intricately connected with our developing relationship with the Father, Son and Spirit. Prayer and reception of the sacraments “fills us up” with God’s grace as we journey toward heaven as disciples of Christ.

May God bless you during the coming year.

Acknowledgments

The Christian Family Movement writes and edits its own program materials. This program book is the work of the following CFM members, offered for the good of the movement in its mission to promote Christ-centered family life.

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The Scripture quotations contained herein are from the New American Bible, Revised Edition (NABRE), available online at the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops website, www.usccb.org.

Outline of a CFM Meeting

CFM groups usually meet in homes. The group members take turns hosting the meeting. If this is impossible for reason of the size of members' homes or geographical distances involved, groups sometimes meet in a church facility.

Sign of the Cross

Mark your time together as sacred by beginning in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Gather and Report on Actions

Take a few minutes to let one another know how your life has been since you last met. Group members report on the progress of CFM actions taken individually, as a family, or by the group.

Scripture Reading and Opening Prayer

God's word and our prayer move group members out of their busy lives and toward the issues of the meeting. Prayer helps them to focus on these issues from a Christian perspective.

SOCIAL INQUIRY (Observe, Judge, Act)

Observe

Members should "Get the facts." At this stage of the meeting, members should refrain from expressing their opinions about facts. They should try to simply report, like any good objective newspaper reporter. The knowledge and experience of group members are valuable, but the group must go beyond its own members to gather facts from the larger world and report them objectively. One can editorialize later.

Judge

For CFMers, to judge is not to find another person sinful or holy; it is rather the comparison of how things are with how things should be, in accord with Gospel values. To make such a comparison requires objective observation of how things are, as well as a sincere effort to determine the teaching of Jesus.

Act

If the group judges - through prayer, reflection, and observation - that things are not as they should be, then ways to bring about a change will come forth from the group. Actions listed in the book are suggestions. The best actions come from the group. They may be directed toward improving family life and relationships, or toward the community and beyond.

Closing Prayer

Prayer is supplied for each meeting, but this is also a good time to offer prayers for the intentions of the group.

Social Time

A short social with simple and inexpensive refreshments helps members to know and understand one another better and builds community.



Hosting A Meeting

Many CFM groups rotate hosting the meeting each month. The host often facilitates the meeting, or another member takes this role.

Call the couples in your group 3 to 4 days before the meeting to remind them to come, give directions, etc. Encourage them to do their Actions and Observations before the meeting.

Try to involve your children in the preparation for the meeting. The night of the meeting, ask them to help welcome everyone - help take coats, put out the snacks, etc. Keep refreshments simple. Provide beverages (soft drinks, coffee, tea) and some sort of dessert after the meeting.

Start on time and end on time. Remember the social time after the discussion is also important for the building of community...and relaxing! If the discussion goes too long it will mean less social time.

Be aware of the time and “keep it rolling” in order to progress from OBSERVES to JUDGES to ACTS...the whole sequence is the CFM meeting. If you’re spending more time on one question, call a “time out” to get on track or skip a question or two to keep things moving.

Don’t be afraid of silence. Often people need time to organize their thoughts before they respond. Leave time for this to happen.

Try to stick to the questions. If a really good side discussion happens, encourage people to continue it during social time.

ONE

Following Jesus: The Source of Christian Stewardship

The Sign of the Cross

Gathering and Report on Actions

Opening Prayer

Glorious God,
Strengthen us, your children, with the riches of your Glory.
Deepen our faith in your Son, Jesus, who dwells within us.
Open our hearts and minds to comprehend what is the breadth and
length and height and depth of the love of Christ.
Fill us with the fullness of your Life,
So that by your power at work within us,
You are able to accomplish far more than all we ask or imagine.
Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit.
Amen.

- Based on Ephesians 3:14-21

Scripture Reflection

*But we hold this treasure in earthen vessels, that the surpassing
power may be of God and not from us.*

- 2 Corinthians 4:7

*It will be as when a man who was going on a journey called in his
servants and entrusted his possessions to them. To one he gave five
talents; to another, two; to a third, one--to each according to his
ability.*

Then he went away. Immediately the one who received five talents went and traded with them, and made another five. Likewise, the one who received two made another two. But the man who received one went off and dug a hole in the ground and buried his master's money.

After a long time the master of those servants came back and settled accounts with them. The one who had received five talents came forward bringing the additional five. He said, 'Master, you gave me five talents. See, I have made five more.' His master said to him, 'Well done, my good and faithful servant. Since you were faithful in small matters, I will give you great responsibilities. Come, share your master's joy.'

(Then) the one who had received two talents also came forward and said, 'Master, you gave me two talents. See, I have made two more.' His master said to him, 'Well done, my good and faithful servant. Since you were faithful in small matters, I will give you great responsibilities. Come, share your master's joy.'

Then the one who had received the one talent came forward and said, 'Master, I knew you were a demanding person, harvesting where you did not plant and gathering where you did not scatter; so out of fear I went off and buried your talent in the ground. Here it is back.' His master said to him in reply, 'You wicked, lazy servant! So you knew that I harvest where I did not plant and gather where I did not scatter? Should you not then have put my money in the bank so that I could have got it back with interest on my return? Now then! Take the talent from him and give it to the one with ten. For to everyone who has, more will be given and he will grow rich; but from the one who has not, even what he has will be taken away.'

- Matthew 25: 14-29

- How do we honor the power of God with the treasures we hold in “earthen vessels”?

- What does the parable from Matthew 25 teach us about the source of our gifts, as well as the responsibility we have as stewards?
- How can we be faithful in small matters as defined by the Parable of the Talents?

Social Inquiry

We can all relate to finding a treasure. The excitement can be all consuming. We must have it. Similarly, Jesus describes the kingdom of heaven in this scripture passage, “The kingdom of heaven is like a treasure buried in a field, which a person finds and hides again and out of joy goes and sells all that he has and buys that field” (Mt 13:44). That is what a relationship with Christ is like. The more we get to know him, the more we want to know him. We desire to become his disciples. We become part of his kingdom and he bestows his abundant treasures upon us. Out of our love for him, we respond to his generosity and goodness by caring for and sharing these blessings with the world.

Discipleship & Stewardship

Christian stewardship is essentially an expression of our discipleship. The foundation for the life of a steward is one’s relationship with Jesus Christ. Christian stewards are foremost disciples who have responded to Christ’s call, followed Jesus, and shaped their lives in imitation of Christ’s (United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB), 2002, 9).

As we commit to discipleship we are called to be faithful stewards of all that we have received. Stewardship is an attitude of the heart by which disciples of Jesus see *all* of life as gift and *commit* to a daily sharing of their own gifts with a generous heart. “Christian stewardship, therefore, applies to everything—all personal talents, abilities, and wealth; the local, national, and worldwide environment; all human and natural resources wherever

they are; the economic order; governmental affairs; and even outer space” (USCCB, 2002, 48). A Christian steward “receives God’s gifts gratefully, cherishes and tends them in a responsible and accountable manner, shares them in justice and love, and returns them with increase to the Lord” (USCCB, 2002, 9).

Our twin calls to discipleship and stewardship are firmly rooted in the sacraments of initiation (Baptism, Eucharist and Confirmation). Through the Sacrament of Baptism, we receive the life of Christ in us. We receive gifts of faith, hope, and charity and begin a journey of faith. The call to stewardship also begins when we receive the spirit of Christ in Baptism. Through Baptism, each person becomes a steward of God’s grace for the world. Our faith brings hope to all we are committed to – our family, parish, schools, neighborhoods, co-workers, and all whose needs our faith compels us to notice and to serve.

In Confirmation, our life of faith is strengthened by the Holy Spirit. We are given the gifts of the Spirit (wisdom, knowledge, right judgment, understanding, courage, reverence, and wonder and awe in God’s presence) to guide our journey as disciples and stewards.

Gathering around the table of the Lord to celebrate the Eucharist nourishes our Christ-centered way of living. When we unite ourselves sacramentally with the Body and Blood of Jesus, we are healed, strengthened, and ever-more called to love and serve as Jesus.

As Jesus so powerfully teaches us in the Parable of the Talents, the call to be “faithful in small matters” has great implications for our lives as stewards and disciples. We are indeed obligated to use our gifts for God’s greater purposes and to trust that as we give of our time, talent, and treasure, God will supply the grace we need for our lives as disciples.

Observe

1. What do you see as your greatest gifts from God?
2. Share examples of how your family uses these God-given gifts in support of extended family, neighbors, your parish, your community, and across borders?
3. Who is someone you know who is living out his or her call to discipleship and stewardship? How?
4. Look up the definitions of the words “ownership,” “stewardship,” “gift” and “possession.” Discuss the meaning of and differences between these words.

Judge

1. What are the challenges you encounter in responding to the call of stewardship? What are ways we can “bury” our talents?
2. Have you made the intentional choice to become a follower of Christ? What led you to this choice?
3. How has one or more of the sacraments called you to live out stewardship?
4. What benefits have you experienced from sharing your time, talents and treasure?

Act

1. Do you have a neighbor who needs help with household chores? If so, commit as a family to take care of one of these tasks for them.
2. As a family, make a written list of your treasures (the things given to you by God). Read Luke 6:38. Consider how God

may be calling you to cultivate these to help build his Kingdom? Take a concrete action.

3. Review family finances. Evaluate how you use your financial treasure to support your parish as well as other charitable causes. Choose one additional charity you can support in the year ahead.
4. Read the 2002 U.S. Bishops letter, *Stewardship: A Disciple's Response* found at:
<http://old.usccb.org/stewardship/disciplesresponse.pdf>.
5. Commit to share your faith and at least one of your talents through service in your parish (e.g. catechetical, liturgical, administrative, or outreach ministries offered by the parish).

Preparation for the Next Meeting

1. Date _____
Time _____
Place _____
2. Phone or email host if you cannot attend.
3. Look ahead to the Observe questions for the next meeting.
4. Who could we invite to join our group?

Closing Prayer

"..we hold this treasure in earthen vessels, that the surpassing power may be of God and not from us." - 2 Corinthians 4:7

As we receive all blessings from God in gratitude – time, treasure and talent – may we also give of these gifts in gratitude in order to build up the Kingdom of God in our family, our Church, and throughout the world we encounter each day. Amen.

TWO

Growing in Holiness: The Stewardship of Self

The Sign of the Cross

Gathering and Report on Actions

Opening Prayer

O Lord God,

May no habit get such a grip of me
That I cannot break it
If it keeps me from you.

Help me always to keep
My body fit and healthy,
My mind attentive to your voice,
My soul clean and pure.

Help me at present to discipline and
Train myself, to learn and to study,
So that I may be able to respond to your invitation
To be a steward of your love and goodness in this world.

Amen.

Adapted from Prayer for Good Habits, www.turnbacktgod.com, 12/18/12.

Scripture Reflection

There was a scholar of the law who stood up to test him and said, “Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?” Jesus said to him, “What is written in the law? How do you read it?” He said in reply, “You shall love the Lord, your God, with all your heart, with all your being, with all your strength, and with all your mind, and your neighbor as yourself.” He replied to him, “You have answered correctly; do this and you will live.”

- Luke 10:25-28

- Why is it significant that the lawyer, with Jesus’ prompting, was able to answer his own question?
- What is more challenging: understanding God’s call or doing God’s will?

Social Inquiry

Many people spend their lives searching for the purpose to life. Since Jesus’ exchange with the lawyer who wanted to know the greatest commandment, the Church has taught that Christ calls each human being, above all else, to love, know, and serve him. Answering this call is our purpose. When we seek to love and know Christ, we grow in holiness and, with his grace, can begin to resemble him to those around us.

Yet, while the call to holiness may be universal, each way of living it out is full of its own distinct challenges. Staying faithful on our unique path to holiness demands that we keep ourselves properly disposed to hearing and following God’s will. Indeed, we must each be stewards of ourselves, attentively nurturing the gifts God has given in order to love and know him better.

According to St. Ignatius of Loyola, founder of the Jesuit order, our stewardship of self is first about seeing all things in relation to our essential purpose: “We ought to use these things to the extent that they help us toward our end, and free ourselves from them to the extent that they hinder us from it” (Ganss, 1992, 32)

This indifference to things, except in how they help us live out our call, finds a more modern expression in the contemporary Catholic writer and speaker, Matthew Kelly. He explains that recognizing our essential purpose “brings clarity to everything else in our lives. What makes a book, friend, marriage, job, or movie good? . . . The people, experiences, and things we fill our lives with either help us to become the-best-version-of ourselves or they don’t. In every moment we simply need to ask ourselves, ‘Which of the options before me will help me to become the-best-version-of-myself?’” (Kelly, 2008, 11)

In particular, good habits, both spiritual and personal, best foster the kind of sustained and steady growth that allows us to live out our call and become increasingly more mindful and discerning about our essential purpose. In short, we must practice to become more perfect. In his book, *Rediscovering Catholicism* (2002), Matthew Kelly contends that the difference between those who become saints and those who do not boils down to the fact that saints have better habits. These saint-making habits form the life of virtue, “a habitual and firm disposition to do good” (Catechism of the Catholic Church (CCC) 1997, paragraph 1833).

The stewardship of God’s gifts involves the thoughtful cultivation of virtue that in time refines us physically, emotionally, intellectually, and spiritually. A habit of gratitude to God for all of his gifts, for example, would require seeing all of creation as good gifts from our Creator. The early twentieth century writer, G. K. Chesterton imagines what a habit of continual gratitude might look like:

“You say grace before meals.

All right.

But I say grace before the play and the opera,

And grace before the concert and pantomime,

And grace before I open a book,

And grace before sketching, painting,

Swimming, fencing, boxing, walking, playing, dancing;

And grace before I dip the pen in the ink.”

(Ahlquist, 2003, 16)

Among the habits refining us into a better version of ourselves, spiritual disciplines, such as prayer, spiritual reading, and confession of sins, require particular attention. The time devoted to these habits is time where we allow God to remake us in his image. The stewardship of ourselves involves humbly allowing God’s grace to transform us, so that we may be of full service to others, to our family, and to our community.

Observe

1. Describe a time when you felt that, at least for a moment, you were the “best version of yourself,” the person God is calling you to be. Why?
2. In what ways do you care for your physical well-being?
3. Consider the books, films, programs, periodicals or other media that you “fill your life with.” Make a list of the last ten. Share the highlights of this list with the group.
4. Describe the friendships you see as helping you become a better version of yourself.

5. What ministries or resources are available in your parish or community to foster spiritual and personal growth?

Judge

1. Why is it important to focus on becoming the best version of yourself? How does it compare in importance to the love of God and neighbor? (Recall Jesus' conversation with the lawyer in the Scripture reflection above).
2. Why is it difficult to focus our lives on our essential purpose? What leads us astray from the path of becoming the person God has called us to be?
3. What habits of mind, body, or soul are the most challenging for you to cultivate? Which habits would most help you to become a better steward of your life?
4. How can we encourage our spouses and children to grow into the best version of themselves? How has marriage and family life helped you to become the best version of yourself?

Act

1. Identify one habit – spiritual, emotional, physical, or intellectual – that you need to either break or cultivate. Set a goal and create specific objectives for yourself in regard to this habit.
2. Select a prayer to add to your daily routine. Consider the Prayer of St. Ignatius (below), the Jesus prayer, or a period of mental prayer.

Prayer of St. Ignatius of Loyola

Take, Lord, and receive all my liberty,
my memory, my understanding
and my entire will,
All I have and call my own.
You have given all to me.
To you, Lord, I return it.
Everything is yours; do with it what you will.
Give me only your love and your grace.
That is enough for me.

3. Read a spiritual book. If possible, read the same book as another member of the group and plan to discuss it before the next meeting.
4. Visit DynamicCatholic.com to learn about the Dynamic Catholic Book program and consider whether your group could sponsor making more spiritual books available at your parish or in your community.

Preparation for the Next Meeting

1. Date _____
Time _____
Place _____
2. Phone or email host if you cannot attend.
3. Look ahead to the Observe questions for the next meeting.
4. Who could we invite to join our group?

Closing Prayer

Heavenly Father,

Bless us in our everyday lives

That we may hold ourselves in balance

Before all created gifts and not be bound to them,

But only to the deepening of your life within us.

Guide us so that we do not fix our desires on health or sickness,

Wealth or poverty, success or failure, a long life or a short one.

Keep us mindful that everything has the potential of calling forth
in us a deeper response to our life in you.

May our only desire be this:

To want and choose what better leads

To your deepening of your life within us.

*Adapted from "The First Principle and Foundation," by St. Ignatius of
Loyola, found on Boston College Website, www.bc.edu*



The Spirit of Action

Action is defined as the love of Christ through love of others. This is what sets a CFM group apart from a study group. A meeting which does not result in a change in our way of living is an empty exercise.

CFM groups are called “Action” groups and not discussion groups because they are meant to form people through the action that results from the social inquiry and discussion.

There are many forums for action. The home, neighborhood, parish, and community provide opportunities for action. In addition, actions can be of various types: charitable (service or contribution to a charity), spiritual (hosting an evening of reflection), educational (sponsoring an effective parenting workshop), or political (spearheading a tax change for education). These are just a few examples. Actions should flow from the meeting.

The best actions come out of your action group experience and allow members to act individually, or as couples, families, or groups, to improve the quality of family or community life. Here are some ways to find some simple ideas for actions:

- Read your local newspaper, paying special attention to articles about community needs.
- Identify and learn about local charities and service agencies that minister to needy families.
- Contact them and find out what type of volunteer support they need and ways CFM can assist them.
- Check the CFM website, www.cfm.org, for more ideas.

THREE

Sharing Your Gifts: Natural Talents and Spiritual Charisms

The Sign of the Cross

Gathering and Report on Actions

Opening Prayer

Gracious God,
You are generous beyond our understanding,
so great is your wisdom and providence in our lives!
We thank you for the varied and unique gifts
that your Spirit has poured into the hearts of your children.
Help us to understand and use our gifts
so that we can effectively build up your Kingdom on earth.
Amen.

Scripture Reflection

For as in one body we have many parts, and all the parts do not have the same function, so we, though many, are one body in Christ and individually parts of one another. Since we have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us exercise them: if prophecy, in proportion to the faith; if ministry, in ministering; if one is a teacher, in teaching; if one exhorts, in exhortation; if one contributes, in generosity; if one is over others, with diligence; if one does acts of mercy, with cheerfulness.

- Romans 12:4-8

To each individual the manifestation of the Spirit is given for some benefit. To one is given through the Spirit the expression of wisdom; to another the expression of knowledge according to the same Spirit; to another faith by the same spirit; to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit; to another mighty deeds; to another prophecy; to another discernment of spirits; to another varieties of tongues; to another interpretation of tongues. But one and the same Spirit produces all of these, distributing them individually to each person as he wishes.

- 1 Corinthians 12:7-11

- According to these passages, who receives a gift of the Spirit? What is the purpose of these spiritual gifts?
- What is your experience of the “individual parts” working together in the “one Body in Christ”?

Social Inquiry

Christian stewards are people who share their gifts with and for the world. The earliest Christians understood that through the power of the Holy Spirit, God enabled them to continue the mission of Jesus. From the New Testament, Catholic Tradition, and lived experience of Christianity, we discover God gives us both spiritual gifts (*charisms*) and natural talents, both of which are ultimately meant to be used for God’s greater purposes, particularly to build the Kingdom of God.

In his 1988 Exhortation on the Lay Christian Faithful, Pope John Paul II wrote that “Every Christian is called to participate actively and co-responsibly in the Church’s mission of salvation in the world” (Pope John Paul II, 1988, 20). Indeed, through the

stewardship of our talents and charisms, we become “God’s co-workers” (1 Corinthians 3:9) in sharing the Gospel.

So what is the difference between natural talents and charisms? Though fundamentally a gift from God, a talent is an ability at which a person excels. Talents are often inherited and part of our genetic makeup. However, they also require practice and fine-tuning. Talents are meant both for our own self-fulfillment, as well as to accomplish our calling in life. They are retained regardless of our relationship with God (Huntington & Weddell, 2002, 8-12).

A *charism*, a Greek word in the New Testament meaning “favor” or “gratuitous gift,” (CCC, 1997, paragraph 2003) is an ordinary or extraordinary “spiritual gift granted by the Holy Spirit that gives a Christian special empowerment” to bring God’s love into the world (Huntington & Weddell, 2002, 7). Charisms are supernatural gifts of God that are offered to us so that we can collaborate with his loving purposes. Charisms are always focused outward: they are meant for the benefit of others, not us, and are explicitly used for God’s purposes. Charisms grow in power and effectiveness as our relationship with God grows, and as they are used to serve others. They also can fade when we do not use them for the good of others (Huntington & Weddell 2002, 7-11).

Through Baptism & Confirmation, the Holy Spirit has given every Christian a spiritual gift for the building up of the Church (CCC, 1997, paragraph 951). 1 Peter 4:10 states, “As each one has received a gift, use it to serve one another as good stewards of God’s varied grace.” St. Paul describes a variety of charisms in the New Testament. Many are considered ordinary, such as administration and teaching, for the fulfillment of daily tasks of the church community. Other charisms are extraordinary,

such as the gifts of healing, discernment of spirits, and prophecy. While the Church does not have an exact number of charisms “approved,” there does seem to be a common group of twenty-four spiritual gifts found in Scripture & Tradition (Weddell, 1988, 23-59).

Charisms			
Administration	Celibacy	Craftsmanship	Discernment of Spirits
Encouragement	Evangelism	Faith	Giving
Healing	Helps	Hospitality	Intercessory Prayer
Knowledge	Leadership	Mercy	Missionary
Music	Pastoring	Prophecy	Service
Teaching	Voluntary Poverty	Wisdom	Writing

While talents often come naturally to a person, charisms need to be discerned. Discovering your spiritual charism takes time and patience. Upon “using” the spiritual gift, one should pay close attention to the following three characteristics: First, a charism will be *affirmed* by the community (e.g. someone with the gift of encouragement may often hear, “You always have a way of helping me feel better about my life and my faith”). Second, the charism will be *effective* and “do the job” it was meant to do. Third, using a charism is experienced as *joyful*, not burdensome (Huntington & Weddell, 2002, 7-12).

As parents are stewards of their children, they have a responsibility to help their children discern which talents and spiritual gifts God has given them for the good of others. In addition to discovering children's spiritual gifts, recognizing the charisms of a larger community is also fruitful and brings great purpose and direction to a parish, family, or Christian organization.

Discovering your charism empowers your life as a Christian disciple & steward. It also frees one from feeling the need to "do it all." Instead of stewardship becoming a burden by taking on too many ministries or serving in ways that are not a good "fit" for your gifts, knowing your charism will help you to experience stewardship as joyful and life-giving.

Observe

1. Look at the list of charisms on the previous page. How have you received the blessing of another's spiritual gift in your life?
2. What is one spiritual gift God has possibly given you for the building up of the Body of Christ?
3. Religious orders and parish communities have unique charisms. Choose 2-3 religious orders and research the unique charisms for which they are known. What charisms do you observe in your parish or Christian organization to which you belong? How have you experienced a community's charism?
4. What spiritual gifts do you see in your spouse? Children? Extended family? Fellow members of this CFM group?

Judge

1. Charisms need to be discerned and developed. How might you better discover & develop your spiritual gifts?
2. How can discovering your charism(s) and talents be empowering for your life as a Christian disciple & steward?
3. What are the ramifications when Christians neither discern nor employ their gifts?
4. Think about your children and their gifts. How can parents help their children to use and develop their talents & spiritual gifts for the Kingdom?
5. Do you think collaboration (working together to achieve a common goal) of talents and gifts among the members of the Body of Christ is being done well in the church? Why or why not?

Act

1. Affirm for another person this month how you have experienced a spiritual gift through him or her.
2. Go to www.siena.org to learn about the Catherine of Siena Institute and how they form lay people as stewards of their spiritual gifts. Talk with your pastor about your parish or diocese hosting a Called and Gifted Program from the Catherine of Siena Institute.
3. Study the list of charisms listed in the social inquiry of this chapter and reflect on the Scripture verses that list spiritual

gifts (Romans 12:4-8; Ephesians 4:7, 11-13; 1 Corinthians 12:7-11). Ask God to show you your spiritual gift and then practice using it this month. Pay attention to how you feel and whether you receive any affirmation for your gifts.

4. Read about one of your family's favorite saints or spiritual role-models. Two excellent resources are Amy Welborn's "The Loyola Kids Book of Saints" and "The Loyola Kids Book of Heroes." Help your children name the spiritual gift of that saint and what difference that gift made to the world and the church.

Preparation for the Next Meeting

1. Date _____
Time _____
Place _____
2. Phone or email host if you cannot attend.
3. Look ahead to the Observe questions for the next meeting.
4. Who could we invite to join our group?

Closing Prayer

Generous God,

Thank you for trusting us to be channels of your Love for the world. Deepen our awareness of the spiritual gifts we have received and strengthen the power of the Holy Spirit within us to do your will. Make us stewards of your grace and instruments of your providence in the lives of all those we meet, love, and serve in our daily lives. We ask this in the name of Jesus Christ, your greatest Gift to us, Amen.



FOUR

If You Wish to be Perfect: Embracing Simplicity

The Sign of the Cross

Gathering and Report on Actions

Opening Prayer

Heavenly Father, you provide for the birds in the air and the fish in the seas. So do you also provide for our earthly needs. Lord, help us to rely less on our possessions and ourselves, and open us up more fully to complete reliance on you. You alone can fill the empty spaces of our hearts. Fill us with love for you and your people. Amen.

Scripture Reflection

Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and decay destroy, and thieves break in and steal. But store up treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor decay destroy, nor thieves break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there also will your heart be.

- Matthew 6:19-21

The [rich] young man said to him, 'All of these I have observed. What do I still lack?' Jesus said to him, 'If you wish to be perfect, go, sell what you have and give to [the] poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me.' When the young man

heard this statement, he went away sad, for he had many possessions.

- Matthew 19:20-22

- What attitude does Jesus say we are to have toward possessions? Why?
- Why can it be so hard to give away what we have?
- Why do you think the rich man could not let go of his possessions?

Social Inquiry

Making the decision to live more simply is the opposite of striving to “keep up with the Jones.” Living simply is not just living within a budget. To live a life of simplicity means understanding the difference between true needs and wants. This concept is countercultural in a society that equates acquisition of more “things” with success and happiness (Catholic Diocese of Wichita, 1999, 34).

Many families, burdened by mortgages, home repairs, career demands, extracurricular activities, educational expenses and the like often yearn for a return to “simpler times.” But living a life of simplicity goes beyond that. “It asks us to slow down and evaluate the work and other activities with which we fill our time by considering the following question: Which ones lead us closer to God, and which ones do not?” Put another way, “Simplicity removes the material ‘noise’ that distracts our attention, and quiets our souls so that we can direct our thoughts to the divine.” (Catholic Diocese of Wichita, 1999, 35).

In his book, *Living with Less: The Upside of Downsizing Your Life*, Mark Tabb describes it this way, “Let me get right to the point: The only way to get more out of life is to choose less. Less stuff. Less activity. Less wanting more. Less of you... Choose less because less is more... I know real life is not measured by how much I own, but I assumed I could own as much as I wanted to as long as I kept everything in its proper perspective. I can’t. None of us can.” (Tabb, 1996, ix- x)

Tabb goes on to explain that the busy-ness of our lives – work, school, bills, repair calls, driving the kids to their activities – leaves us with little time left over for anything else. Little time for God, little time for serving others in need in our communities, little time to be with those we love. The author’s point is that by simplifying our lives we open up time and space for the things we know matter most in this life and our eternal lives. He goes on to remind us that, in many cases, we choose all this busy-ness. We could say “no” to the volunteer committee work or the kids’ extra activities, but we don’t. All of this activity makes us feel useful and important, but these aren’t always the types of activities that help us in our spiritual journeys, striving for heaven and a close relationship with our Father.

Christian stewards ask of their possessions and activities, “Will these *things* bring me closer to God and help me to accomplish his mission?”

Observe

1. Take three days and record how you and your family spend your time. Identify what purpose each activity serves.
2. How does your family make decisions regarding acquiring new possessions? Is the process different for needs versus wants?

3. How does your family make decisions regarding activities, volunteer commitments and work?
4. What pressures do you feel from your parish, neighborhood or larger community regarding possessions, activities, volunteer efforts and work?

Judge

1. Reflect on the things and activities that you are attached to. Are these attachments leading you closer to God or farther away?
2. How is living more simply related to stewardship?
3. People often say life was simpler in previous generations. Do you agree? What has changed in our culture during your lifetime to make simple living a greater challenge?
4. How do you find the right balance between enough possessions and excessive stuff? Appropriate activities and excessive activity?
5. How would your life change if you decided to strive for a simpler lifestyle? What benefits do you think you would see?
6. Scripture talks about giving “the first fruits” (Deut. 26:1-4, Tobit 1:6-8) to God and giving generously as God has been so generous with us. How does living a simpler lifestyle impact your attitude toward tithing?

Act

1. Look at your family calendar with your spouse. Discuss whether changes need to be made to enable the family to free up more time for prayer and/or service to others.
2. Clean out one closet a month and donate the items you are not using to a charitable organization.
3. For Advent or Lent, refrain from purchasing any non-essential items. At the end of the period, you may elect to donate the money you didn't spend on these items to someone in need.
4. Read *Money in the Kingdom of God: Six Essential Attitudes for followers of Christ*, a Bible Study about attitudes toward, and the use of money and possessions (Susan Vogt, The Word Among Us Press, 2011) and/or *Simplicity Parenting: Using the Extraordinary Power of Less to Raise Calmer, Happier, and More Secure Kids* (Kim John Payne and Lisa M. Ross, Ballantine Books, 2010).
5. Adopt the “one-in, one-out” habit of giving something away whenever you purchase something new (ex. clothes, toys, etc.).

Preparation for the Next Meeting

1. Date _____
Time _____
Place _____
2. Phone or email host if you cannot attend.
3. Look ahead to the Observe questions for the next meeting.
4. Who could we invite to join our group?

Closing Prayer

Come Holy Spirit!

Come into our hearts and the hearts of our family members;

Help us to slow down and listen to you;

Help us to discern your will for our lives;

Help us to spend more time with loved ones and less time on
“things”;

Help us to see the needs of others and respond to them;

Help us to simplify our lives so that we might know you more.

Amen.



FIVE

Treasuring Your Loved Ones: The Gift of Family

The Sign of the Cross

Gathering and Report on Actions

Opening Prayer

Gracious God and Father, you have called us to grow in holiness and to help our spouse and children grow in holiness, so that one day we may all be together with you in heaven. We recognize that living in family life is a calling, a vocation. We also know that it is sometimes difficult. Help us to be good stewards of our spouse and children. We rely on you to give us the grace to live as you have called us to live. We ask this in Jesus' name. Amen.

Scripture Reflection

Whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him to have a great millstone hung around his neck and to be drowned in the depths of the sea.

- Matthew 18: 6

Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, heartfelt compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience, bearing with one another and forgiving one another, if one has a grievance against another; as the Lord has forgiven you, so must you also do. And over all these put on love, that is, the bond of perfection. And let the peace of Christ control your hearts, the peace into which you were also called in one body. And be thankful.

- Colossians, 3: 12-15

- We want to protect our families. What are the moral dangers our families face today?
- We want to raise our children to follow Christ and trust in God. How does family life give us opportunities to practice the virtues described in the Scripture passage?

Social Inquiry

Stewardship of our families has two related tasks: to protect and to nurture. Pope John Paul II wrote that the family “at its very roots” has the “*mission to guard, reveal and communicate love.*” He called this mission a “living reflection of and a real sharing in God’s love for humanity and the love of Christ the Lord for the Church His bride.” (Pope John Paul II, 1981, #17).

Stewardship: A Disciple’s Response describes these responsibilities to both protect and educate about the Christian life: “Parents, for instance, have work of great importance to do in the domestic church, the home. Within the family, they must teach their children the truths of the faith and pray with them; share Christian values with them in the face of pressures to conform to the hostile values of a secularized society; and initiate them into the practice of stewardship itself, in all its dimensions, contrary to today’s widespread consumerism and individualism.” To answer this call, a family might have to make difficult changes in its lifestyle (USCCB, 2002, 32).

Parents steward their children in many ways. For example, parents are responsible for keeping their children safe, not only by keeping them away from danger but by gradually teaching them to make safe and healthy choices and to recognize danger for themselves. Parents also teach prayers to their children and seek to build up a habit in the child of turning to God with trust and love when faced with a worry or concern. Parents’ goal should be to build self-mastery and personal initiative for Christian virtues in the child so that he will become an adult steward of himself.

The tradition of viewing parents as stewards of their children and the Church's teaching on the domestic church goes back to the earliest days of Christianity. Bishop and preacher St. John Chrysostom (340-407) insisted that the family's mission is to be a force in society to cultivate the kingdom of God. He expected that raising Christian children would be a priority for married parents who took their faith seriously. He explained his expectations for the work of the Christian home: "When we teach our children to be gentle, to be forgiving, to be generous, and to love their fellow men...we instill virtue in their souls and reveal the image of God within them. This, then, is our task: to educate both ourselves and our children in godliness; otherwise what answer will we have before Christ's judgment seat?" (Roth and Anderson, 1986, 68 and 71).

Stewarding our families means realizing that children are a gift from God. They are not ours to possess. When we present them for Baptism, we allow God to set their hearts on fire, leading them to himself through a specific vocation, maybe even religious life. We are called in all circumstances to give our children back to God. At some point we will be called to give them back to God by giving them to another person in marriage, religious life, or adult single life, and ultimately through death into eternity. Children are ours for the time specified by God.

In our families, we are stewards of our children but also of each other, husband and wife. "Daily a husband dedicates himself generously to the good of his wife, and she dedicates herself daily to his good." (Flores, 2010, 5). Husbands and wives are called to "die to themselves" every day so that the marriage may flourish. Married couples are called to grow in generosity towards their spouse and others. They nourish their relationship by making time for one another, serving one another, listening to one another and always seeking the good of the other. In other words, as stewards of each other, husbands and wives are called to help each other grow in holiness.

Observe

1. Tell about a couple who have demonstrated how to be stewards of their marriage and children (either people you know personally or research someone who appears in the news or history).
2. What outside influences send messages to your family that undermine your efforts to protect and nurture them?
3. Describe an experience in your family life where you recognized God's grace at work.
4. Name two family practices that help you raise your family to love and trust God.
5. Talk to some "empty-nesters" about their experience of "letting their children go" to follow their vocations. Identify the various stages at which we "let our children go" in one way or another.

Judge

1. Do you view your family as a domestic church? How?
2. What can we do to teach virtues to our children? Which virtues do you find most challenging for children to develop?
3. What if our children or spouse reject our stewardship? What can one do when this happens?
4. What would you like to do differently to better protect and nurture your family's faith life?
5. What is one concrete way to support marriage and family life in society?

Act

1. As a family, retell the stories and celebrate your child's baptism and your own baptism and marriage.
2. Name one practice that you would like to do differently in the stewardship of your family. Implement this change.
3. Speak of religious life as well as marriage when discussing vocations with your children. Invite a priest or sister to dinner.
4. Plan a date with your spouse and pray for your marriage on a regular basis.
5. Practice this Blessing Prayer and Ritual with your children and other family members.

One of the simplest family practices is the practice of blessing one another (making the sign of the cross on another's forehead). Parents can bless their children when they are leaving for school or work, and spouses can bless one another, too.

Preparation for the Next Meeting

1. Date _____
Time _____
Place _____
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3. Look ahead to the Observe questions for the next meeting.
4. Who could we invite to join our group?

Closing Prayer

Dear God,

Thank you for the life you have given us and for the opportunity to nurture life in our family.

Through your unique call to each of us, whether married, single, priest, brother, sister, consecrated secular or deacon, you invite us to a deeper relationship with Jesus Christ.

With the Holy Family as our model, may our home be a true domestic church, a center of faith and love where we listen for and say “yes” to your call.

Bless our marriage and strengthen our resolve to raise our children faithfully. May we help them hear your call and encourage them in their vocations. We pray that all families actively foster vocations.

Empowered by the Holy Spirit, we join together to support members of our church family in their vocation, loving you and one another every day.

Amen.

Adapted from “Family Prayer for Vocations,” Missy Parkison, reprinted with permission.

SIX

Loving Our Neighbors, Living in Solidarity

The Sign of the Cross

Gathering and Report on Actions

Opening Prayer

Prayer of Saint Francis

Lord, make me an instrument of your peace.
Where there is hatred, let me sow love;
where there is injury, pardon;
where there is doubt, faith;
where there is despair, hope;
where there is darkness, light;
and where there is sadness, joy.

O Divine Master, grant that I may not so much seek
to be consoled as to console;
to be understood as to understand;
to be loved as to love.

For it is in giving that we receive;
it is in pardoning that we are pardoned;
and it is in dying that we are born to eternal life. Amen

Scripture Reflection

When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit upon his glorious throne, and all the nations will be assembled before him. And he will separate them one from another, as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. He will place the sheep on his right and the goats on his left. Then the king will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my

Father. Inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, a stranger and you welcomed me, naked and you clothed me, ill and you cared for me, in prison and you visited me.’ Then the righteous will answer him and say, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you drink? When did we see you a stranger and welcome you, or naked and clothe you? When did we see you ill or in prison, and visit you?’ And the king will say to them in reply, ‘Amen, I say to you, whatever you did for one of these least brothers of mine, you did for me.’

- Matthew 25: 31-40

If anyone says, “I love God,” but hates his brother, he is a liar; for whoever does not love a brother whom he has seen cannot love God whom he has not seen.

- 1 John 4:20

- What do these passages teach us about the dignity of the human person?
- What challenges you the most about these Scripture passages?

Social Inquiry

Who makes up a community? Is it a family, a neighborhood, a church, a town, state, country, the entire world? We divide ourselves into groups and form attachments to others in many ways, but how does God see us?

As Christians, we believe that we are all members of God’s family, united by the sacrifice of Christ on the cross. We share responsibility for one another. We know that everything we have received comes from God and that we will be held accountable by Him for all that we have been given. This sense of responsibility “extends far beyond our natural inclination to care for ourselves and our immediate families. Responsibility is caring for all God’s

creation, especially those most fragile and marginalized: the unborn, the poor, the sick, the aging. Responsibility is sharing all that God has given us. And, responsibility is returning with increase all that He has entrusted to us.” (Catholic Diocese of Wichita, 1999, 22-23).

If we believe that all people are creations of God, then our responsibility to care extends to all people. Though our ability to act may be limited, we are all called to take action on behalf of others. Stewardship for our community means sharing what we have because all gifts come from God. This means sharing generously of our material wealth, finding ways to share our talents to benefit others, accepting the gifts that God has given others to share, and entering into relationship with our neighbors.

If we can enter into relationship with others, especially those who may be different from us, we open the door to solidarity. “Solidarity helps us to see the ‘other’ – whether a person, people or nation – not just as some kind of instrument, with a work capacity and physical strength to be exploited at low cost and then discarded when no longer useful, but as our ‘neighbor’, a ‘helper’ (cf. Gen: 2:18-20), to be made a sharer, on par with ourselves, in the banquet of life to which all are equally invited by God.” (Pope John Paul II, 1987, #39).

Solidarity can happen in many ways: being a mentor; sponsoring a child or family in an under-developed country; supporting Fair Trade practices; building a house with a Habitat for Humanity family; teaching an English as a Second Language class; or being a foster parent. These are just a few examples of actions that might flow from an awareness that not everyone in the world shares our material comforts, and educational and career opportunities.

When we take seriously the call to solidarity, then the words of St. Ambrose, a bishop of fourth century Milan, must give us pause, “You are not making a gift of your possessions to the

poor person. You are handing over to him what is his. For what has been given in common for the use of all, you have arrogated to yourself. The world is given to all, and not only to the rich.” (www.Osjspm.org/option_for_the_poor.aspx).

God’s call to be stewards of our community can be lived out in many of our everyday actions. In the U.S. Catholic Bishops document “Everyday Christianity: to Hunger and Thirst for Justice,” we read: “The most common and in many ways the most important Christian witness is often neither very visible nor highly structured. It is the sacrifice of parents trying to raise children with concern for others; the service and creativity of workers who do their very best and reach out to those in need; the struggle of business owners trying to reconcile the bottom line and the needs of employees and customers; and the hard choices of public officials who seek to protect the weak and pursue the common good. The church’s social mission is advanced by teachers and scientists, by family farmers and corporate executives. The Catholic social mission is also carried forward by believers who join unions, neighborhood organizations, business groups, civic associations, the pro-life movement, groups working for justice, or environmental, civil rights or peace groups. It is advanced by Christians who stand up for the values of the Gospel. This mission is the task of countless Christians living their faith without much fanfare or recognition who are quietly building a better society by their choices and actions day by day.” (USCCB, 1998, paragraphs 3-5).

Observe

1. Who is your “brother”?
2. Being in solidarity does not always mean ‘doing something for’ but rather taking time to ‘be with’ and getting to know others. Look in your local newspaper (or on the internet) for stories about parts of your local community that are in great

need. Bring the articles to the meeting or consider sharing from your own experience of living in solidarity.

3. How have you witnessed others acting as good stewards of the community?
4. Who is someone in your life who has modeled the practice of solidarity?
5. How have you experienced your community caring for you?

Judge

1. If Jesus were with us, physically, today, where would he make his community?
2. What everyday choices and actions can you and your family make to be better stewards of your community? To build a better society?
3. What does solidarity mean to you? How can you better model the principle of solidarity for the children in your life?
4. Review the quote from St. Ambrose. Do you agree with what he said? In light of the words of St. Ambrose, what is our responsibility to the poor?
5. Why are some parts of the community neglected/in greater need? To what part of your community do you feel most called to serve right now?

Act

1. Find a part of the community that is different from you and get to know people there. This might be people from another ethnic group (immigrants or refugees), another faith, a different generation, or a different socio-economic group.

2. Following the concept of the Lenten Rice Bowl, consider having a simple meal one night/week and donate the money saved to a Food Bank or other relief service.
3. Pray for those we need to love. By thinking about them personally before God, we will grow in love for them. Growing in love for them will move us to action.
4. Consider sponsoring a child or elderly person through the Christian Foundation for Children and Aging, www.cfcausa.org; or sponsoring a child or family through Common Hope, www.commonhope.org.
5. Refer to the articles you brought to the meeting (Observe #2). Talk about these issues with your family or friends. Try to see the issue from the point of view of the people in need. What might you do to help? Learn more by visiting Catholic Relief Services at www.crs.org/act/ or the U.S. Catholic Bishops web site www.justiceforimmigrants.org/parish-kit.shtml.

Preparation for the Next Meeting

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3. Look ahead to the Observe questions for the next meeting.
4. Who could we invite to join our group?

Closing Prayer

Christ Has No Body

Christ has no body but yours,
No hands, no feet on earth but yours.
Yours are the eyes with which he looks
Compassion on this world.
Yours are the feet with which he walks to do good;
Yours are the hands with which he blesses all the world.
Yours are the hands, yours are the feet;
Yours are the eyes, you are his body.
Christ has no body now but yours,
No hands, no feet on earth but yours,
Yours are the eyes with which he looks
compassion on this world.
Christ has no body now on earth but yours.

- Teresa of Avila (1515–1582)

Ways to Grow CFM in Your Parish

1. PRAY that the Holy Spirit will guide you and will open the hearts of couples to hear the message of CFM.
2. Meet with someone or multiple people on the parish staff (pastor, director of religious education, pastoral minister) to tell them about CFM. They will be able to refer others to CFM and help you build groups.
3. Personal invitation is the best method to use in adding new members. Face-to-face or phone calls work best.
4. Think of a few people you could ask to join a group. Call these people.
5. At church or school functions, look around and notice people present. Would they like CFM? Keep a running list of these names over the year. Start calling them when you are ready to start a group.
6. Ask you parish staff to help identify people who would be interested in CFM. For example, baptism classes, RCIA, new parishioners, mom's or men's groups, catechists, service volunteers.

SEVEN

Caring for God's Creation

The Sign of the Cross

Gathering and Report on Actions

Opening Prayer

Hallelujah!

Praise the LORD from the heavens; praise him in the heights.

Praise him, all you his angels; give praise, all you his hosts.

Praise him, sun and moon; praise him, all shining stars.

Praise him, highest heavens, you waters above the heavens.

Let them all praise the LORD's name; for he commanded and they were created,

Assigned them their station forever, set an order that will never change.

*Praise the LORD from the earth, you sea monsters and all the
deeps of the sea;*

*Lightning and hail, snow and thick clouds, storm wind that fulfills
his command;*

Mountains and all hills, fruit trees and all cedars;

Animals wild and tame, creatures that crawl and birds that fly;

*Kings of the earth and all peoples, princes and all who govern on
earth;*

Young men and women too, old and young alike.

*Let them all praise the LORD's name, for his name alone is exalted,
His majesty above earth and heaven.*

- Psalm 148: 1-13

Scripture Reflection

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came to be through him, and without him nothing came to be.

What came to be through him was life, and this life was the light of the human race; the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.

- John 1:1-5

Then God said: 'Let us make human beings in our image, after our likeness. Let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, the birds of the air, the tame animals, all the wild animals and all the creatures that crawl on the earth.'... God also said: 'See, I give you every seed-bearing plant on all the earth and every tree that has seed-bearing fruit on it to be your food.'

- Genesis 1: 26, 29

- For what purpose did God create the earth and all its creatures?
- What does it mean for man to have dominion over the earth and its creatures?

Social Inquiry

As Christians we believe that the earth and everything on it was created by an all-knowing, all-powerful, all-loving God. He gifted all of creation to the one creature made in God's own image and likeness – man. "The Lord God then took the man and settled him in the garden of Eden, to cultivate and care for it." (Genesis 2:15) As caretakers of God's creation, we act as his stewards, and, therefore, are charged with protecting and preserving the environment.

Having “dominion” over the earth and its creatures (Genesis 1:26) does not mean man has the right to abuse the earth. Rather, man has the responsibility to “cultivate and care for” the earth (Genesis 2:15). There are many programs and organizations devoted to protecting the environment, animal life and human life. The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops has an environmental justice program called “Caring for God’s Creation.” This program works to bring Catholics to a deeper respect for God’s creation and encourages parishes to participate in activities that address environmental issues, especially as they affect the poor. This program advocates for “environmental policies which protect the poor, promote environmental health and safety, ensure that the right to private property is balanced with the claims of the common good, and promotes sustainable environmental and economic development.” (<http://old.usccb.org/sdwp/ejp/>).

In November 2012, the U.S. bishops and other Catholic leaders gathered to discuss the global impacts of climate change. According to Bishop Stephen E. Blaire, chairman of the USCCB Committee on Domestic Justice and Human Development, "These impacts often multiply the hardship experienced by the most vulnerable people in the world. Pope Benedict has consistently drawn attention to these issues and urges all to take moral responsibility to reduce our environmental impact and our carbon footprint. This symposium is an important step in guiding our Catholic response to these challenges." (<http://www.usccb.org/news/2012/12-188.cfm>).

In his 2009 Encyclical, “Caritas in Veritate (Charity in Truth)”, Pope Benedict XVI addresses the need to protect the environment for future generations while emphasizing that nature

is not more important than humanity. “Today the subject of development is also closely related to the duties arising from *our relationship to the natural environment*. The environment is God's gift to everyone, and in our use of it we have a responsibility towards the poor, towards future generations and towards humanity as a whole. When nature, including the human being, is viewed as the result of mere chance or evolutionary determinism, our sense of responsibility wanes. In nature, the believer recognizes the wonderful result of God's creative activity, which we may use responsibly to satisfy our legitimate needs, material or otherwise, while respecting the intrinsic balance of creation. If this vision is lost, we end up either considering nature an untouchable taboo or, on the contrary, abusing it. Neither attitude is consonant with the Christian vision of nature as the fruit of God's creation... But it should also be stressed that it is contrary to authentic development to view nature as something more important than the human person.” (Pope Benedict XVI, 2009, #48).

Being a steward of God’s creation involves appreciation, protection and preservation of nature. It also means respect for human life, God’s highest creation. In addition, we are called to collaborate with God in the work of creation through our human achievements and our work. “Christians see human achievements as “a sign of God’s greatness and the flowering of his own mysterious design” (*Guadium et Spes*, no. 34)” (USCCB, 2002, 25). For example, we work at jobs, we create and appreciate art in various forms, and we utilize technology. All of our work is a partnership with God in building up the Kingdom of God (USCCB, 2002, 42-43).

Observe

1. Share a time when you have experienced God through His creation.
2. In what ways does your family act to respect God's creation?
3. What are the natural resources in your area? What steps are being taken in your community to preserve these resources for future generations?
4. Research a news report where environmental concerns come into conflict with other interests (economic, social, political, etc.). How do the affected communities attempt to manage these conflicts? Report on these news items to your group.

Judge

1. What are the attitudes/beliefs in our culture that challenge our ability to be good stewards of God's creation?
2. How can we find the right balance between respecting the environment and meeting the needs of the people in that area? What can we do?
3. Reflect on the diverse wonders of God's creation. How does the beauty of God's creation draw us closer to him? What does it reveal about the nature of God?
4. How do we feel about God's creation when a natural disaster strikes?

5. Many areas of the world suffer from a lack of natural resources. What is our responsibility toward the people in these areas?
6. To what extent can equal distribution of natural resources actually be achieved?

Act

1. Plant a garden in your backyard to experience the miracle of food growing from seeds. Share this task with your children. Join with other families to plant a garden at your parish to provide fresh produce for the local food pantries.
2. Learn about community gardens in your city and find out if there are ways you can help.
3. Identify things you can do in your family, parish or community to preserve the environment for the benefit of future generations.
4. Work for/support initiatives that provide clean water and sanitation in developing countries. You can learn more about these programs through Catholic Relief Services.
5. As a family, think about ways to reduce your consumption which, in turn, reduces your waste.
6. Become familiar with the benefits of consignment or re-use outlets. Before purchasing something new, ask yourself if you could find it secondhand.

Preparation for the Next Meeting

1. Date _____
Time _____
Place _____
2. Phone or email host if you cannot attend.
3. Look ahead to the Observe questions for the next meeting.
4. Who could we invite to join our group?

Closing Prayer

You may split into two groups to say the closing prayer.

Side One:

*O LORD, our Lord,
how awesome is your name through all the earth!
I will sing of your majesty above the heavens.*

Side Two:

*When I see your heavens, the work of your fingers,
the moon and stars that you set in place—
What is man that you are mindful of him,
and a son of man that you care for him?*

Side One:

*Yet you have made him little less than a god,
crowned him with glory and honor.*

Side Two:

*You have given him rule over the works of your hands,
put all things at his feet: All sheep and oxen,
even the beasts of the field,
The birds of the air, the fish of the sea,
and whatever swims the paths of the seas.*

All:

*O LORD, our Lord,
how awesome is your name through all the earth!*

- Psalm 8: 2, 4-10



EIGHT

Growing in Grace: Nurturing the Call to Stewardship

The Sign of the Cross

Gathering and Report on Actions

Opening Prayer

Lord, you call us to be like you.
Hear us for we are small and weak.
We need your wisdom and your strength.
Let us walk in your grace in all that we do.
Let us hear your voice every day, calling us to your work.
Let us learn the lessons you have taught
So, each day is a growth in our discipleship.
Make us always ready to come to you
So, we can do your work with our hands, our hearts, and our
minds.
Amen.

Scripture Reflection

I am the true vine, and my Father is the vine grower. He takes away every branch in me that does not bear fruit, and everyone that does he prunes so that it bears more fruit. You are already pruned because of the word that I spoke to you. Remain in me, as I remain in you. Just as a branch cannot bear fruit on its own unless it remains on the vine, so neither can you unless you remain in me. I am the vine, you are the branches. Whoever remains in me and I in him will bear much fruit, because without me you can do nothing.

- John 15: 1-5

They devoted themselves to the teaching of the apostles, and to communal life, to the breaking of the bread, and to the prayers...many wonders and signs were done through the apostles. All who believed were together and had all things in common; they would sell their property and possessions and divide them among all according to each one's need.

- Acts 2:42-44

- What does it mean to “remain” in Jesus? How do we remain in Him?
- How did the early Christians act as stewards of the Gospel? What support did they have for their call to follow Christ as a disciple & steward?

Social Inquiry

Being a disciple of Christ is a total way of life that requires ongoing conversion (USCCB, 2002, 15). Our daily decision to follow Christ in word and deed is intimately connected to our call to live as stewards. Indeed, the closer we remain to and in Christ, the more our call to stewardship will grow and develop. Using the first Christians as models, we can grow in stewardship through prayer, study, celebrating the Eucharist & Reconciliation, and through community with other disciples.

Prayer is the heart of Christian stewardship. Through prayer we unite our minds and hearts to God, and open ourselves to doing God's will. Jesus models this way of life for us. In the Gospels, often after spending the day healing and preaching, or before embarking on a new day of his ministry, he goes away to pray, “spending the night in communion with God” (Luke 6:12) (Catholic Diocese of Wichita, 1999, 10-11). Like Jesus, this

intimacy with God through prayer helps his disciples (all of us) to recognize the needs of the world and discern where God is calling us to serve and share our unique gifts.

We read in Acts 2 that the early Christians “devoted” themselves to the “teaching of the apostles.” We cannot know God or his calling in our lives as stewards if we do not know God’s Word or Truths that have been revealed and explained through the Church. Adult faith formation in which adults study the faith through books, classes, retreats, small groups, and spiritual direction will lead to a deeper relationship with the Lord and a more generous attitude of the heart to serve God through their personal gifts and material resources.

Regular attendance at the Eucharistic celebration is a potent source of growth in stewardship. The Eucharist unites us with Jesus. By receiving his Body and Blood, Jesus lives more fully in us. He lives within us giving us the wisdom and the strength to persevere in the acts of stewardship to which we are called. By receiving the Eucharist, we are living out the greatest model of stewardship: Jesus gave his life for the salvation of all humanity. We too become more open and more generous because he transforms us in this sacrament of union.

In the Sacrament of Reconciliation, which is a sacrament of healing, we celebrate the gift of God’s mercy and infinite grace. We can reflect on ways we have failed to live as a good steward of our resources and gifts, of our faith and of our self, family, earth, and community. This sacrament is life-giving and essential for growth as a disciple and steward of God’s grace.

Finally, stewardship is nurtured through the encouragement, accountability, and witness of other disciples of Jesus. We learn how to be good stewards by having stewardship

modeled for us. Primarily this is through the experience of family life and Christian friendships. Community life is also experienced through involvement in the parish and other ecclesial communities. The more we grow in spiritual friendships and deepen our connection in our own local church, the greater we realize the beauty of the diversity of gifts needed for the church's mission, as well as the responsibility of each member of the Body of Christ to give of their time, talent, and treasure.

Observe

1. What times do you set aside for prayer in your life? When do you pray with your spouse, with your children?
2. What prayer services beyond the Eucharist are offered by your parish and diocese?
3. What are the opportunities for adult faith formation and small Christian community offered by your parish and diocese?
4. Share your experience of being a part of a small faith community, either your current CFM group or another community (e.g. Bible study, prayer group, youth group, men's group, church choir) and how it has impacted your growth as a disciple & steward.

Judge

1. How are you being called to nurture your relationship with Christ so you can serve as the steward the Lord calls you to be?
2. Are you committed to attending the celebration of the Eucharist? What steps do you take to make the celebration of Mass a priority for your family?

3. What is the greatest challenge to spending more time in quiet prayer in your day? What is one change you can do to make prayer a greater priority?
4. How important is it to stay involved with the Church community? Can we be “Lone Ranger” Catholics and still grow as a disciple of Jesus?
5. What is necessary for us to thrive and be able to give as Catholic stewards?

Act

1. Commit to a time each day for personal prayer and prayer with your spouse.
2. Explore opportunities for adult faith formation at your parish or in your diocese. Commit to trying a Bible study, retreat, or class on the Catholic faith.
3. Encourage people to participate in small faith communities. Invite someone new to join CFM! Start planning your summer kick-off event and brainstorm with your group about people you can invite to join CFM.
4. Be resolved to participate in Sunday Mass every week. Consider attending a weekday celebration of the Eucharist.
5. Commit to receiving the Sacrament of Reconciliation once a month.

Preparation for the Next Meeting

1. Date _____
Time _____
Place _____
2. Phone or email host if you cannot attend.
3. Look ahead to the Observe questions for the next meeting.
4. Who could we invite to join our group?

Closing Prayer

Breathe into us, Holy Spirit.
That we may turn to what is holy.
Move us, Holy Spirit.
That we may do what is holy.
Protect us, Holy Spirit.
That we might never lose what is holy.
Amen.

Adapted from a prayer of St. Augustine

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About the Christian Family Movement

When families join the Christian Family Movement, they become part of the national lay movement that is CFM-USA. CFM is not a movement unless it has a constituency that subscribes to its philosophy, methodology, and theology. The mission of the Christian Family Movement is to promote Christ-centered marriage and family life, to help individuals and their families to live the Christian faith in everyday life, and to improve society through actions of love, service, education and example. This is our mission. If we accept this mission, we will support it with our time, talent, and money.

Membership entitles a family to receive a program book and a subscription to ACT, the national newsletter, and supports the development of the Christian Family Movement.

The Community of CFM

People group together by accident, choice or design, but community is more than this. Members are open to one another, united in mutual respect (even when they disagree), and are willing to be honest about how they think and feel. As people get to know each other, trust and openness seem to develop around a fellow member in need or for a neighborhood concern. As you work together to answer a need, community forms. Community learns how to laugh at foibles, takes time to relax, play, recreate its humanity, and evaluate its needs and direction.

CFMers look upon one another as good friends and allies. They look to CFM as a source of continuing education, lively support and regular encouragement.

CFM: Promoting Family Life

From its beginnings, CFM has been a grassroots movement with action for justice always at its heart. Today's groups have adapted to the times but bear a strong resemblance to those that launched the Movement in the 1940s.

CFM has members in many countries worldwide, all of which cooperate as the International Confederation of Christian Family Movement, ICCFM. www.iccfm.org. ICCFM is active in 40 countries, including Canada, India, Sri Lanka, Singapore, Philippines, Thailand, Slovakia, Hungary, Portugal, Malta, Spain, Africa (Malawi), Mexico, Colombia, Venezuela, Peru. Members of CFM-USA support the mission of ICCFM with \$1 per family.

CFM: Decades of Acting on Faith

When the U.S. Catholic bishops designated the 1980s as the "Decade of the Family," CFM quickly stepped up to the plate to address the diverse needs of families. In addition to its annual program, special books were also published for the widowed, divorced and separated, teens, families in crisis, and middle-years families.

In 1987, CFM contributed to a consultation with the U.S. bishops in preparation for the synod in Rome on the Vocation and Mission of the Laity in the Church and in the World. CFM also provided input to the U.S. bishops' 1994 pastoral letter, *Follow the Way of Love*.

The National Association of Catholic Family Life Ministers presented CFM with its special-recognition award in 1993 for enhancing the quality of life for families. CFM was one of the founding members of the Families Against Violence Advocacy Network, and in 1999 received FAVAN's Circles of Peace Award.

In 1999, CFM celebrated 50 years of forming families through action with a gala jubilee celebration at Notre Dame University, and the Hillenbrand Institute awarded CFM its prestigious Salt and Light Award.

In 2009, CFM was represented at the Pontifical Council for the Family planning for the World Meeting of Families held in Milan in 2012. CFM participated in the Marriage Summit of Catholic family life organizations, conducted by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops in 2012.

How CFM Is Supported

From the original CFM groups over fifty years ago, CFM has grown into both a national and an international movement. At first, the movement's expenses were borne by the founders: personal out-of-pocket expenses, operating out of the space in one's own home, and donations of goods and services by sympathetic third-party donors.

As the movement grew through the commitment and involvement of thousands of couples, the logistics of servicing and coordinating the larger numbers of people exceeded the volunteer contributions of time and money.

Thus, a national office is absolutely necessary to coordinate and serve the needs of CFM over a vast geographical area. It should be obvious that such an office needs grass-roots support to continue to function.

The major source of financial support comes from the annual paid memberships of CFMers. This is the lifeblood of our continued existence. Many generous volunteers donate additional time, talent and treasure to make CFM available throughout the world. Of course, monetary donations are always welcome.

For more information about CFM, contact the National Office www.cfm.org , e-mail: director@cfm.org.

National Communications

Share your group's actions with ACT, the national electronic newsletter of the Christian Family Movement by sending information to the editor, act-editor@cfm.org. Photos of groups in action are always a plus.

- ACT gives pertinent information about the family: sociological, theological, and psychological.
- ACT tells you what Christian Families are doing.
- ACT keeps you in contact with Christian Families throughout the country and around the world.
- ACT will tell you about current CFM programs and family life resources.

Please return the membership form provided by your leader along with your annual donation, so that your membership may be recorded and ACT can be sent to you. ACT is included as a part of your membership.

Help for Group Leaders

You will find helpful information for leaders at www.cfm.org. Monthly topical emails are also sent to parish leaders to provide timely assistance with common concerns. Additional assistance for group leaders is published regularly in ACT.

Contact director@cfm.org to find CFM group leaders in your area. They will be happy to speak with you on the phone and guide you and share their experience of CFM.



Joseph Cardinal Cardijn (1882-1967)

Joseph Cardinal Cardijn, a Belgian priest, pioneered the cause of the youth, workers and lay participation in the Church. He felt compelled to help the young people of his time, who were forced to leave school in order to work in corrupt conditions in the factories. He founded the Young Christian Workers movement in the early 20th century, to help young workers find the answers to their problems and to bridge the abyss between the working class and the church. He developed the see-judge-act method upon which the CFM method of Observe-Judge-Act is based.

The Cardijn Community International is seeking canonization of Cardinal Cardijn. More details on his life can be found at www.josephcardijn.com.

Group Members

Names: _____

Address: _____

City/State/Zip: _____

Phone: _____

E-Mail: _____

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