

GIVING WISELY

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Christian Stewardship & Charitable Giving

Christian stewardship reminds us to use our resources wisely. Charitable giving is a direct, practical way of putting our values into action. By placing our giving within a Gospel framework every gift can become an occasion for and a celebration of growth in faith. Follow these wise giving guides to get the most from your giving – for you, your family, your church and your favorite charitable causes.

1. Plan your giving. Christian stewardship teaches us to make prayerful decisions and to put God first. God has generously provided for different people in different ways and in return, we are called to be financially generous to give – not just when it's convenient or from what's left over after all our needs and desires are met. We should seriously evaluate our financial circumstances each year and plan our charitable giving rather than simply toss money at needs or give without thinking.

One planning strategy is to budget an amount based on a percentage of your income. Christian stewardship advocates that all we have (and all we earn and accumulate) is a gift from God. As stewards of these gifts, we strive to always be grateful, to use them responsibly, to share in love and justice with others, and to make a return with increase to the Lord. Giving in a responsible, sacrificial way in proportion to what we have takes deliberate and prayerful planning.

Contributions tend to bunch up at the end of the year. For more satisfaction & fewer headaches, *anticipate* your charitable gifts and *budget* for them. Planned, intentional giving puts you in control, minimizes taxes and other costs, and maximizes the benefit.

Charitable foresight pays its biggest dividends in retirement and estate planning. Various giving strategies can generate a lifelong income, eliminate capital gains taxes, reduce estate taxes, provide for spouses and family members, and channel resources to the causes you care about. Estate planning is an opportunity to reflect on our lives, account for our possessions, and expand our life's journey beyond our place and time to benefit others.

2. Make financially efficient, tax-effective gifts. A well thought out charitable gift can earn you more than a tax deduction. Instead of writing a check, for example, use appreciated stocks for gifts. You'll earn a deduction based on the stock's current value, plus you'll sidestep capital gains taxes on its appreciation. Insurance policies, real estate and personal property offer other alternatives to cash.

If you plan on making charitable bequests through your will, it may not pay to wait. Make the gift now through a trust, gift annuity or other deferred vehicle. You'll earn an immediate charitable deduction and reduce your estate's tax exposure.

Few realize it, but IRAs, 401Ks and profit sharing plans usually have income taxes due when their owner dies. Using such plans for charitable gifts can be an efficient way to cut tax exposure and pass on more to heirs.

Select a trusted, qualified professional to help you plan gifts that meet your charitable goals and your financial situation.

- 3. Focus your giving.** Do you feel burdened with too many requests for charitable contributions? Do you make a minimal gift just to show support or because it's easier than saying "no?" Consider focusing your giving on a handful of causes that matter most to you. Giving should be a joyful experience, not an obligation or a burden.

Use a two-part strategy. Allocate a portion of your gifts to things that have immediate impact, like weekly church offerings, annual campaigns, and benefits. Allocate the other portion to causes that build their impact over time, like capital projects or foundations. For long-range impact, endowment gifts are highly effective. They regenerate charitable support year after year, their impact mounting with time. Endowment gifts should generate support perennially, and appreciate sufficiently to keep pace with inflation.

Select organizations that foster your personal values and have track records of sound management and solid results.

- 4. Connect giving and volunteering.** Christian stewardship includes time and talent, as well as treasure. When you share your time and your talents with organizations that you believe in, it can make giving a lot more satisfying. A good place to start volunteering is with the organizations you support.

- 5. Set an example.** Philanthropy is a learned behavior. Like other values, it is taught mainly by example. As Catholics, the act of collecting and offering our financial gifts is part of the Mass each week. This forms the value and habit of regular giving to the Church, and gives witness to stewardship of the Church.

Today, many people use electronic giving for their weekly offertory. Most offertory envelope companies print envelopes with a check box on the front for electronic giving, so that people who use electronic giving can still drop an envelope into the collection basket as a visible sign of their gift. Consider the envelope the "wrapping paper" for your gift.

When organizations you believe in ask for an endorsement, don't be bashful. Your commitment can sway others, giving your gift a multiplier effect. The process of sacrificial giving depends mainly upon the testimony of lay people to motivate parishioners. Your personal witness story can inspire others and be an occasion for you to grow in stewardship.

Children learn the value of charitable giving from their parents. Work with your children during their early years to establish a generous spirit through giving. In some circumstances, children can be designated as successor advisors to your philanthropy. By doing so, you can help pass on the value of giving to future generations.

- 6. Make a lasting impact.** You don't have to be a Carnegie or Rockefeller to make gifts that never stop giving. An endowed gift is a highly effective way to support the causes you care about forever. In the long run, permanent charitable endowments have a greater dollar impact than any other gift.

Until about 1970, our Catholic institutions were blessed with a "living endowment" of priests, religious women and brothers who through their lifelong contributions underwrote the operations of our institutions. Historically, our needs were capital or building. Today, our Catholic institutions must raise three kinds of dollars every year: 1) Operations – for ongoing expenses like salaries and utilities; 2) Capital – to keep facilities adequate and in good repair; and 3) Endowment – to build and maintain a stable base of support to enhance and expand base programs and ministries. A wise giving plan should include all three kinds of gifts.

- 7. Discuss your charitable goals with your advisors.** No one wants to reduce the impact of their charitable giving. Yet few take the time to find out how they can get the most impact for their charitable dollar. Tell your attorney, accountant, and other financial advisors about your charitable goals. With their help you can structure your giving so that it accomplishes the most for you, your heirs, and your favorite charitable causes.

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