

FAITHFUL SERVANTS:  
**STEWARDSHIP  
AND CARITAS**

Michael McGirr



**Caritas**  
AUSTRALIA

## Faithful Servants: Stewardship and Caritas

### Michael McGirr

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Michael McGirr is the Mission Facilitator and Community Engagement Manager at Caritas Australia. He is the author of many books including *Ideas to Save Your Life, Every Day is New, Brave New World: Courage and Caritas* and *A World Made Whole: Partnership and Caritas*

This book was written on Naarm, the traditional lands of the Wurundjeri People of the Kulin Nation. Respect is paid to their elders of the past, present and future.



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*This book is dedicated to the staff of Caritas Australia over sixty years.*

# Introduction

## *Stewardship and fragility*

Some years ago, I was invited to the wedding of dear friends. Instead of a reception, they invited all their guests to travel with them from the service to the international airport. As we sipped champagne on the steps of the church, they changed into casual clothes and then a convoy of cars headed off.

For my friends, this was a symbol of what love meant: stepping off on a big journey together. They were going to travel overseas for six months, maybe more, but had planned nothing beyond their first stop, which was Paris. They would invent the itinerary as they went along. All they wanted was to be together and to face whatever the future threw at them. They had given up the lease on their apartment and now had only carry-on luggage. It must be said that they were young.

The couple had made it known that they didn't want any cumbersome gifts. A few people had discretely slipped them envelopes but that was it. There were speeches and a cake at the doors to passport control and this attracted the interest of bystanders, some of whom began taking photos. There were hugs and kisses and at last the big moment arrived.

Just then, an elderly aunt broke through the throng. She had a present in a sizable box and insisted the couple take it with them. Clearly, she had not got the memo. Or maybe she had and decided it was balderdash. Anyway, they could hardly refuse.

Aunty Clovis was famous for living by her own rules.

It turned out the box contained two exquisite antique champagne flutes. They were beautiful but fragile.

When they later told the story, they said that at first, they were vexed and frustrated. They had their hearts set on travelling light. By the time their flight was boarding, however, they had agreed that if they were serious about accepting the world on its own terms, they may as well start right now with Aunty Clovis and her cumbersome package. They realised that there is no such thing as travelling light. It's a bit of a myth.

Indeed, those glasses changed their whole adventure, which lasted 18 months. Everywhere they went, they produced the glasses and toasted the moment, no matter if it was with cheap guava juice or expensive water. They drank on top of the Eiffel tower and the bottom of Montblanc, the foot of the Parthenon and the head of the Nile, the Spanish steps and the Russian steppes.

They noted how this pair of glasses changed the way they travelled. They set themselves the challenge of eventually bring them home safely and so they packed more carefully and often moved more gently. They had something fragile with them which they had decided to value. This meant becoming more attentive to small things, more aware of situations that could damage the crystal. They had to focus a bit less on themselves and a bit more on what they carried with them. They became the stewards of those glasses.

Stewardship means taking care of what has been entrusted to us. It means journeying through life in a way that protects what is most fragile.



## Chapter One

### Stewardship and memory

**M**useums are more than storage facilities for old stuff. The best of them not only engage the visitor but take them on a personal journey.

An example is the Apartheid Museum in Soweto, South Africa, on the outskirts of Johannesburg. It is a living tribute to the pain of South Africa's long history of racial segregation. On arrival, visitors receive a ticket that assigns them to one or other racial group in proportion to the size of those groups during the apartheid years. Their experience varies depending on the arbitrary nature of those tickets. Those who are designated as white get to sit at some of the displays. Those designated as black must stand. As you can imagine, they don't need many seats.

The museum is an example of stewardship. It not only holds a tradition, a story or a history. It shares those experiences it by

allowing visitors to be more than passive onlookers. It creates community around a living experience.

Stewardship is the discerning and purposeful sharing of something important. It could be a resource, a tradition or a spirituality. The word is often applied to the appropriate use of money, and rightly so. But if you consult Dr Google about Christian stewardship, you will find oodles of advice to pastors about getting more money out of their congregations and just as much advice to congregations about wringing every possible dollar out of their purses and wallets. Stewardship is a much richer and deeper idea than this, which is why it is one of the core values of Caritas Australia.

Stewardship is about trust, one of the most severely depleted resources in the world today. Trust is in short supply these days and is easily forfeited. Indeed, we live in an age of shattered trust, of endless scams, fakery, deceit and manipulation.

Stewardship is about looking after things that matter in a trustworthy way. Those things could include a relationship, an insight, a language, even a recipe. It is not as simple as giving something away. It is using something to build a bridge between people, or between people and their world.

Even more powerful for me than Soweto's apartheid museum is the Timorese Resistance Archive and Museum in Dili. I had the privilege of being taken through by Fernando Pires, who, for some years, has led the work of Caritas Australia in that country. Fernando and his family were deeply embroiled in the resistance movement that spanned 25 years of Indonesian occupation of Timor Leste.

‘They are still finding bodies,’ says Fernando quietly and deliberately. Almost a quarter of the country’s population was killed.

As a young child, Fernando managed to find his way onto a boat and come to Australia, separated from most of his family. His mother, Margarida, stayed behind to look after other children. Her story of caring for young people hiding in the mountains is the stuff of legend. Fernando’s family is intimately entwined with the leadership of the resistance.

It was only on visiting the museum that I was able to grasp quite what this meant and the courage it drew upon. I gazed for a long time at the recreation of an underground cell, the type of place in which his family and friends hid in the jungle for years on end. They were not prepared to let go. They were stewards of their culture and are now stewards of the history of saving that culture. They believe in passing the narrative on to another generation.

Fernando pointed to many pictures in the museum, some yellowing with age, and explained who the people were. Many of them were related to him in some way or another. He could tell stories about them and what they were like as people.

The most emotional part of the experience was coming across the blood-stained clothes of the school children who were killed in the massacre in Dili’s Santa Cruz cemetery in November 1991. These had been recovered by parents who’d been told lies about what happened to their children, over 200 of whom, mostly aged 13 and 14, were gunned down as they fled from armed forces. The parents had discovered the whereabouts of mass graves and recovered shoes, clothes and school bags. The uniforms were

confronting. Displayed reverently in glass cabinets, they looked small and fragile. The bloodstains were still evident. What chance did the kids have who were standing up for the rights of their community?

Their kind of story has been repeated countless times in too many countries.

Opposite this display is a photo of two impressive men sharing a toast with glasses of wine as they flew over the Timor Sea. One is the Indonesian foreign minister of the time, Ali Alatas, and the other is his Australian counterpart, Gareth Evans. They are celebrating a deal struck between their two countries over rights to the oil that could be mined from the sea below.

The display of clothes and the photo of the men present two sharply contrasting images of stewardship.

The photo shows a deal. Two countries vying to get the best possible return for themselves from a natural resource. Stewardship of oil has been one of the engine drivers of history for the last hundred years or more. Here was yet another example. This is stewardship as a business transaction, an arm wrestle between competing interests. That is not the value to which Caritas subscribes.

The other image of stewardship, the display of blood-stained school uniforms, does inspire us. This display celebrates care, sacrifice, hunger for the truth, community, and authenticity. Ironically, young people seemed to understand those values more than the older politicians who had become operatives of an ingrained system.

When Caritas Australia identifies Stewardship as one of our four core values, we are motivated by resistance workers in places such as South Africa, Timor Leste, Ukraine and many more.

We are likewise attuned to the efforts of so many of our partners to care for the earth, especially in the context of climate change which has been exacerbated by narrow minded industrialisation. We often look to the life and teaching of St Oscar Romero (1917-1980), the former archbishop of San Salvador and now patron of Caritas Internationalis. Romero spoke out against the fact that the entire prosperity of his country rested in the hands of 18 families. Their desperation to be controllers rather than stewards led to soul-destroying violence. Speaking on the feast of the epiphany following the assassination of his close friend and social justice advocate, St Rutilio Grande, Romero called his people to another kind of stewardship:

*Peace is not the product of terror or fear.*

*Peace is not the silence of cemeteries.*

*Peace is not the silent result of violent repression.*

*Peace is the generous, tranquil contribution of all to the good of all.*

*Peace is dynamism.*

*Peace is generosity.*

*It is right and it is duty.*

Finally, Caritas Australia is inspired by the deep and lasting stewardship that indigenous Australians have exercised over this land for countless generations. We are mindful that a false notion of stewardship, based largely on the writings of the English

enlightenment philosopher John Locke (1632-1704), led to the wrongful confiscation of that land by Europeans. Locke argued that if land was not ‘improved’, by which he meant economically developed, then it was ‘terra nullius’, no-one’s land. Ownership meant taking advantage. This was his idea of stewardship: it was wrong for land to be unproductive in narrowly economic terms. Locke had many valuable insights, but this was not one of them. Indigenous Australians have called us to a far more generative and authentic understanding of Stewardship: it is a value that enlivens when understood from the perspective of humility and gratitude.

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Much of the commitment of Caritas Australia to the value of stewardship is expressed in our daily attention to the details of our work, some of which may sometimes appear quite hum drum. Every policy is an example of stewardship. All our practices of governance are the same. When we speak of reputational care, risk management, our code of conduct and our safeguarding procedures we are in the realm of stewardship, taking care of the many people we encounter in a wide range of situations. Likewise, our fundraising work calls us to Stewardship. So too does our budgeting. Every financial decision we make calls us to implement this value.

This little book will not delve too far into any of these practical areas, although it will offer a consideration of the special nature of governance in an agency such as ours.

Instead, this book tries to look at what underpins all those important things. If our policies and procedures create the car we drive, this book tries to look at the engine of that car. It will explore stewardship in a number of ways.

The Bible uses the word steward on a few occasions, always with a tinge of power. From Joseph's steward in Egypt (Genesis) to the steward at the wedding of Cana (John), Biblical stewards are invariably people with authority over others. The bible far prefers the word 'servant, which is used exponentially more often. For us, stewardship is an experience of servanthood. It is about creativity, not dominion. Faithfulness, not opportunism. Honesty, not window dressing.

The poet Goethe said famously that anyone whose roots are not grounded in 3,000 years 'wanders in the darkness of ignorance, unable to make sense of the reality around them.' Jostein Gardner translated this as 'anyone who doesn't draw on at least 3,000 years is living hand to mouth.' Our value of stewardship draws on countless generations. It creates new growth on very old roots.



## Chapter Two

### Stewardship, trust and accountability

Stewardship creates relationships. Every year, Caritas Australia organises a range of campaigns, including Women for the World as well as appeals at Christmas and the end of the financial year.

The best-known is Project Compassion which goes all year round but has a special energy during Lent, the time in which Christians prepare for Easter. Project Compassion spurs people to all sorts of activities.

Let me share just a few stories.

In the past year, a school with 35 students in regional Australia organised an Easter parade in their small town to raise money.

A large secondary school on the coast, also in regional Australia, required every student in Year 9 to make something. It could be



woodwork, metalwork, craft, art or even baking. They then held a trade day, and all the money was sent to help Caritas.

A school in a new growth area of a capital city organised tap and go machines to greet parents as they dropped children to school and made sure they had a roster to make sure everyone had the chance to contribute.

Another school organised a photo booth, complete with a dress up box, so students could donate money and in return receive an oddball photo of themselves. There were pancake days, BBQs, zooper dooper days, lines of gold coins, plain clothes days, fancy hat days and heaven knows what else.

At one school, students donated money so they could try to dunk their teachers into cold water. The poor teachers are good sports!

There is a parish in a regional centre which has undertaken a costly and necessary restoration of their beautiful church. They still managed to contribute \$5000 to our work with partners in countries far away.

Stewardship calls us to honour and celebrate all this creativity and energy. The least we can do is to use the money raised as wisely as possible.

Fr Mark Croker, who in his late sixties cares for three parishes in southern NSW, says he is often asked why people should give to caritas before they give to other worthy causes.

‘Give to Caritas because you know it gets there,’ he tells them.

Stewardship is the value that creates this kind of trust. We do not accept money unless we can account for where and how it is used.

We also honour sacrifice. After I spoke at Mass one Sunday, a woman approached me with \$5. She was a single mother and her child had special needs. We spoke for a while and she mentioned that her daily treat, in a demanding life, was a coffee from the machine at her local service station. It got her going in the morning. But for one week she was going to give that money to us.

An older woman travels to our office in Melbourne on a bus then tram to give us money she gathers from recycling bottles and cans. She likes to do it in person, to have a chat. A beautiful man called Nic, who died in December 2023, had supported us for many years. He lived in extremely modest circumstances in a little house that his parents bought decades before and which had seen very few improvements in the meantime. In winter, he basically stayed in a single room with a small heater. There were pictures of his deceased parents and all the people he had loved on a small mantelpiece. He prayed a lot.

Four times a year, Nic came to our office with an extremely generous cheque. He chose to give money to Caritas Australia rather than take out private health insurance. He was prepared to wait a long time for medical attention. He could have used the money to have more heating in his house. Or replace his ancient TV which I don't think even worked.

Once I asked Nic why he was so generous to us. The first thing he mentioned was how much he loved getting personal letters from Supporter Services. These meant a lot to him and created a personal connection. One time, on a lonely day, the CEO rang out of the blue just to say hello. He always mentioned it.

More important for Nic were childhood memories of growing up in an impoverished village in Italy. He was always hungry and often cold. He had no shoes. That was part of the reason his family came to Australia where Nic spent forty years working for the railways.

‘I often think of my childhood,’ says Nic. ‘I don’t want any child to be hungry. I would do as much as possible to stop that.’

Nic’s stewardship of his own experience created his commitment to Caritas Australia.

This is not uncommon. Every week, without fail, supporters ring us to contribute and ask for prayers for all sorts of concerns. They may be going to hospital. A friend or relative might be sick. They may be worried about their children. It might be the anniversary of a death. Sometimes, people even ring and give money when their own circumstances are wobbly, such as soon after losing a job. It is extraordinary and wonderful that people under personal pressure reach out to help others. Again, this is a special kind of stewardship. You might even call it stewardship of grief.

One time, after speaking at a Sunday Mass, an elderly parishioner approached me. She wanted to show me scars from her time at school when at least one teacher regularly hit the back of her hand with a steel ruler.

‘I support Caritas because I know the meaning of injustice,’ she told me.

All of these stories contribute to an overwhelming responsibility to use the resources entrusted to us with the utmost care and a commitment to accountability.

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There are further layers to stewardship, all of which revolve around trust.

The first is that schools abide by an important principle. This is the understanding of ‘no fundraising without education.’ Caritas Australia provides engaging and challenging educational resources that are widely used in primary and secondary classrooms as well as parishes. Teachers appreciate them. Our unspoken covenant with the hundreds of schools that support us is that we enable those schools to help pass from generation to generation a heartfelt appreciation of a faith that does justice. We know that peace, justice and care for the earth are mentioned over two thousand times in the Bible. No other aspect of human life is addressed nearly as persistently and urgently. Our work helps share this story and make real the Christian tradition for young people.

A second is that parishes look to us to help keep alive a sense of God as Love. The word *caritas* means love. In our case, it is a radical and healing love. It is a love which calls us to think big, to embrace the whole human family, especially those most in need. It is love with calloused hands and muddy shoes. Stewardship is closely aligned with accountability, and we have many important measures to make sure we behave in responsible ways. But Caritas Australia is most accountable to those of no account. Part of our commitment to stewardship is helping the communities who support us sink their roots deeper and deeper into the mystery of God’s love.

Thirdly and finally, stewardship is humble. Caritas has nothing

that has not been given to us. Occasionally, we hear comments that we approach people too often or too insistently or with too a heavy agenda. Of course, we try to be clever and persuasive about the ways we share our story. When supporters ask for privacy, we are respectful. We know that a lot of causes, both worthy and not-so-worthy, are making calls day and night and it doesn't help anyone, least of all our partners, if we can be dismissed as a mere nuisance.

But, and this is a big but, stewardship calls us to persistence even in the face of rejection and indifference. There is story in Luke's Gospel about a widow who keeps pestering a certain disrespectful judge. She won't be quiet. Throughout the Gospels, Jesus has a big heart for anyone who is expected by society to be quiet and yet still finds their voice. The judge gives in because she won't. Stewardship for us means raising our voice on behalf of others.

Money may be the root of all evil, but it is hard to do much good without it.



## Chapter Three

### Stewardship and money: a scriptural perspective

A few years ago, a colleague of mine visited Jerusalem. She was one of those people who had always wanted to follow the same path that Jesus took to his crucifixion, but only if she could stay in a four-star hotel at the end of it.

When she returned, she had something she wanted to show me. She had bought two earrings, made of gold, in which had been set tiny coins from the very time of Jesus. They looked more like fragile scraps of metal. In the time of Jesus, these were the least valuable coins available, known as Lenten or more usually mites. We get our word for anything small and worthless from these coins. Two of them together were worth a penny. The funny thing was that my friend had paid hundreds of dollars for them. She wanted them because they reminded her of her favourite story in scripture.

The story of Jesus relates quite often to money. People familiar with the gospels will recognise words such as denarius, talent, shekel, piece of silver and gold.

The story my friend was referring to, told in almost identical words in both the Gospels of Matthew and Luke, is this one. It takes place in the temple. It helps to know that widows were among the most vulnerable members of this society:

Jesus looked up and saw rich people putting their gifts into the treasury; he also saw a poor widow put in two small copper coins. He said, 'Truly I tell you, this poor widow has put in more than all of them; for all of them have contributed out of their abundance, but she out of her poverty has put in all she had to live on.'

The message is clear. What matters is not so much what you give, but the heart that gives it. Jesus had a terrific turn of phrase and underlines his point by saying that the woman had given more than the rich people, because she had given everything. Money is only meaningful for the good things you can do with it. Money and possessions don't make us special of themselves. Being generous with them does make us special. Money presents us with an opportunity to shape our character, to become responsive to others and free from self-centredness.

There are a few things about the story we might consider.

The first is that the story follows one about important people who like to look rich, important and holy and say long prayers yet 'swallow the property of widows.' A story about a loving widow follows one about widows being treated like dirt. In other words,

the widow's mite is a story about authenticity and authenticity is the bedrock of stewardship.

The second is that the incident takes place in Jerusalem just before Jesus dies. It is one of a few incidents, including that of a woman who poor a jar of perfume worth three months' wages over Jesus' feet, which seem to teach Jesus about what he is going to do. He must give all that he has. His stewardship will cost him not less than everything.

The third is that the story takes place in the temple. It is immediately followed by warnings about the destruction of that same temple and the coming of dreadful times ahead. The Gospels of Matthew and Luke were both compiled in the years after the collapse of the temple in 70AD. So why would Jesus be presented as praising a woman who gives all her pittance to a hopeless cause. The Gospels already know that the temple is doomed. The answer is that the woman gives her coins as an expression of hope.

We might ask ourselves why Caritas Australia works so hard to raise money in the wake of a tsunami, cyclone, landslide earthquake or flood when we know very well that another natural disaster is sure to follow. We are a little like the woman in the story. Our work is always an expression of hope. Unconditional hope.

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There are two extremes in the history of Christian spirituality, neither of which are very helpful and neither of which properly express the value the stewardship.

The first is the belief, either covert or overt, that we are all about money. Taken to an extreme, this is seen in the radical individualism of the so-called ‘prosperity Gospel’ which preaches that wealth is a sign of God’s grace and favour. You must work time and a half to reconcile this view with anything in the teaching and story of Jesus.

In less pernicious ways, it is evident in groups that seem to want your money more than they want you. There are times in the history of Catholicism in Australia, especially before government aid was given to schools, when church life was an endless series of fetes and raffles and movie nights and bingo. It was all to build a school or parish, of course. In some places, there was little more to parish life. I knew a parish where Mass goers were told to leave quickly after mass, and not to hang around talking, because the bingo players needed the carpark, and they came first. Surely community should have come before fundraising.

The other extreme is the foolishness of thinking that money doesn’t matter at all. Sometimes you hear a kind of ideological purity from people who are too holy or too far above the common sod to ask for money. I knew a priest who refused to have any appeals for special causes in his church. ‘People come to church to pray,’ he said. ‘Not to be pestered by worldly worries.’ Yet somehow or other, he managed to have a new car every second year. Perhaps it was delivered by angels.

In between is the life of stewardship which is at home in the real world but never loses sight of our spiritual nature.

Jesus has, of course, very much at home with the nuts and bolts of life. There are countless stories in the Gospels which rely on

pecuniary images. The context of this is what Gerard Hughes describes in *God of Surprises* as ‘the lavishness of God.’ Hughes says that God’s lavishness is on display in the well-known story of the two sons in Luke 15, one of whom went away to please himself while the other stayed at home and worked in the family business. Let’s not forget the role of money in this story: the first son demands his inheritance and then squanders it. When he returns, broke and desperate, his father kills a valuable calf to hold a feast in his honour. The calling to forgiveness is not abstract. It takes place in a world which knows the value of a dollar.

Think for a moment of all the times Jesus speaks about money or deals with it in some way:

- the image of a treasure in a field (Mt 13)
- the image of a pearl of great price (Mt 13)
- many stories about tax-collectors, at least one of whom becomes a close disciple of Jesus (Lk 5)
- the workers who turn up at the last minute and still get paid a full day’s wage (Mt 20)
- the image of workers worth their hire (Lk 10)
- the story of the lost coin (Lk 15)
- the story of the temple tax (Mt 17)
- the sellers in the temple (Mk 11; Mt 21; Jn 2)
- the costly perfume used to anoint the feet of Jesus (Jn 12)
- the gold presented at Jesus birth (Mt 2)

- the complaint of the disciples about the cost of feeding the crowd before the miracle of the loaves and fishes. It would be half a year's ages. (Jn 6)
- the wedding banquet (Mt 22; Lk 14)
- the master who forgives a large debt and the servant who won't let go of a small one (Mt 18)
- the woman who had spent all her money on doctors, being exploited (Mk 5)
- Zaccaheus promising to return the money he had extorted (Lk 19)
- the thirty pieces of silver Judas tries to return after the death of Jesus (Mt 27)
- the parable of the talents (Mt 25)
- the warning about starting a building you can't afford to finish (Lk 14)
- the women who followed Jesus and provided for themselves out of their own resources (Lk 8)
- Judas' care for the common purse (Jn 12)
- The rich young man (Mk 10)
- The good Samaritan who left two denarii with the innkeeper (Lk 10)

There are probably others as well. Jesus is in the context of money as often as he is seen in the context of nature.

The unmistakable message is not to become obsessed either by having money, or not having it, but to use it with wisdom, love and fidelity.



## Chapter Four

### Stewards of experience: a philosophical perspective

In the middle of 2023, my son fell from a basketball ring at school and broke his wrist in a way that the faint hearted may not care to read about it, especially if you don't like protruding bones.

An ambulance was called and, before long, I was shaking hands with Matt, whom I had not seen for nine years. In 2014, Matt had been part of a group from that very school that had taken part in a special program in Tanzania, helping kids to acquire enough English to get into high school. I was part of the group. While he was there, Matt travelled a bit on his own and encountered an horrific accident between a truck and a bus. Understandably, it had a deep impact. He was frustrated by his inability to offer any practical help to those suffering serious injury. He made up his mind, there and then, that he was going to study to become a paramedic.

The tragedy of that accident helped Matt cut through the white noise of endless options, something that cripples many young people, and helped him find a powerful direction for his life. His attention had been arrested. He became a steward of a painful experience, using it to navigate a path forward. Almost a decade later, I was one of the beneficiaries as he quickly found a ‘green whistle’ for my son and relieved his pain.

Attention to the world as it presents itself to us is a core part of our mission at Caritas.

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Few philosophers have got under my skin to the same extent as Simone Weil (1909-1943). In just 34 years she moved to a play of eerie depth, filling caseloads of lined exercise books using cheap pens. Her writing is exquisite and whenever I have gone back to it over the past thirty years, it leaves my mind gasping for air, wanting to return to something safer and perhaps shallower. At the same time, I am intoxicated by the sheer beauty of both her vision and her blindness.

Weil went to a deep place as a philosopher, a place she called *decreation*, one in which, like Matt, we encounter our uselessness and ineptitude. For her, this was the opposite of destruction because destruction led to nothingness and no further. *Decreation* was a call to self-transcendence in which we ‘participate in the creation of the world by decreating ourselves’. A tragic bus accident is destruction. Putting your personal needs aside to help when you only want to vomit is *decreation* because, in Weil’s words, by ‘uprooting oneself one seeks greater reality.’

Weil’s whole physical life could be summed up in that last phrase.

She was endlessly uprooting herself. Simone was perplexing, to say the least. She never liked to be touched. She lived with constant migraines and headaches, pushing herself through one barrier of pain after another to be the kind of person her mind required her to be. She had few social graces and people found her abrasive until they got to know her and discovered her fragile tenderness. She so often chose the more difficult path that reading her life story becomes hard work. You long for her to show kindness to herself but she never seems to have done that although she did have moments of serenity. There was no doubt that she became a mystic. But all of us must live in a body and Weil found that less comfortable than pure thought.

Simone Weil was one of only two children. Her brother, Andre, three years older than her, was a genius and became one of the most versatile mathematicians of the 20th century. It is possible that Simone felt that she lived in his shadow, but she was no slouch. When she was nineteen, she came first in the entrance examination for the prestigious *Ecole Normale Supérieure*. The runner up was none other than Simone de Beauvoir (1908-1986), a philosopher whose feminist work was no less important than Weil’s but very different. Beauvoir wanted to save humanity from narrow-minded prejudice; Weil wanted to save it from narrow self-focus. Heaven knows how these two got on with each other. There is a clue in Beauvoir’s ironically titled *Memoirs of a Dutiful Daughter* (1958) where the author recalls suggesting to Weil that the greatest need of human beings was to find meaning in their lives. Weil retorted, in her usual acerbic manner, that Beauvoir had clearly never been hungry. They didn’t speak much after that.

Weil went to great lengths to share the conditions of the

afflicted, starting with vigorous support for left wing political causes. Affliction is a word which, like attention, came to carry a great burden within her philosophy. She regularly abandoned comfortable accommodation to find worse lodgings. She left teaching in schools in middle class areas to find more demanding places to work. When she found manual work on a farm, she refused to sleep in a bed and moved onto the floor of a barn. She abandoned the classroom to take up blue-collar jobs in a list of horrendous factories where she was often injured by machines and furnaces; unskilled women were 'slaves.' She found it hard to keep up the unrelenting pace expected of her, but she stuck at it to the point of utter exhaustion. The conditions of factory work left her, after a year, broken in pieces, body and soul. 'That contact with affliction killed my youth.' She wrote to a priest 'As I worked in the factory, indistinguishable to all eyes, including my own, from the anonymous mass, the affliction of others branded my flesh and my soul.' She came to see that the worst causality of habitual exhaustion was the inability to think.

Weil's death encapsulated so much of her living. In April 1943, she collapsed on the floor of her room and was admitted to hospital and diagnosed with tuberculosis. She refused to eat. The coroner's report read 'cardiac failure due to myocardial degeneration of the heart muscles due to starvation and pulmonary tuberculosis ... the deceased did kill and slay herself by refusing to eat whilst the balance of her mind was disturbed.'

\*

Simone Weil's philosophy was to become anchored to an experience that took place after she left the Renault factory in 1935 and her parents took her to Portugal for respite.

*It was evening and there was a full moon. It was by the sea. The wives of the fishermen were going in procession to make a tour of all the ships, carrying candles and singing what must have been very ancient hymns of a heart-rending sadness. Nothing can give you any idea of it. I have never heard anything so poignant unless it were the song of the boatmen on the Volga. There the conviction was suddenly born in upon me that Christianity is pre-eminently the religion of slaves, that slaves cannot help belonging to it, and I among others.*

Weil never became a Christian in a formal sense but this experience of beauty amid suffering took her mind to a mystical place that she explored in countless ways for the rest of her life. Her pen never rested. Her exercise books kept filling.

In her understanding, the counterbalance to affliction was attention.

One of her most memorable essays is called 'Human Personality', a wonderful exploration of the way in which our dignity has little to do with the ways we shape our lives and our identity has little to do with ourselves as individuals. To think of a person as an individual is, for Weil, to limit them. Despite what many believe, individuality tends to put people in boxes. She claims that you can say 'my person does not count' but never 'I do not count.' The 'I' is more than my current sense of myself.

Weil says, 'we have to try to cure our faults by attention and not by will.' Many people have a DIY approach to identity, including the creation of our values and character. In her life, Weil seems to have been a DIY person herself. In conversation, she spent more time speaking than listening. Her decisions, however inexplicable to those who loved her, were immovable. Even so, she believed



that effort of the will does not make us anything in particular. Our values, character and even identity are not our own craft projects. They are done to us, not by us. Our place is to attend to the world and discover where we belong in an act of surrender. 'Extreme attention is what constitutes the creative faculty in us'

The essay written the year before her death, 'Reflections on the Right Use of School Studies' (1942), should be put in the hands of aspiring teachers. Every classroom has been confronted by attention seeking students. It can be difficult to know what to do without seeing this as a problem and therefore devoting more time to a challenging student and thus inadvertently rewarding poor behaviour. How do you turn attention seekers into attention givers? A way forward is the idea of an attention span, and, like many others, I have been concerned by a sense that the attention span of young people is crumbling. Simone Weil had an almost unbelievable attention span, often spreading her books out on the floor and kneeling before them in rapt wonder for hours on end. This idea of attention as an effort, however, is not quite what she meant. She doesn't want students taught to batten down and chain themselves to work. She wants them to be captivated, not captured. An attention span is like the span of a bridge. It is a means to escape from here. It takes us over water and valley into another country, the non-self.

*Although people seem to be unaware of it today, the development of the faculty of attention forms the real object and almost the sole interest of studies... Most often attention is confused with a kind of muscular effort... Attention consists of suspending our thought, leaving it detached, empty and ready to be penetrated by the object... Our thought should be empty, waiting, not seeking anything but*

*ready to receive in its naked truth the object which is to penetrate it... Prayer consists of attention.*

\*

Caritas is captivated by the world in both its beauty and its pain, both its complexity and simplicity. Our attention to everything that comes to our notice is the basis of stewardship: of holding the sacred dignity of all life with reverence and humility. We share with Weil an understanding that giving attention is a form of prayer, of surrender to energies far greater than ourselves. This does not leave us passive. It means that the actions we take are responsive to the needs of others, not ourselves.



## Chapter Five

### Stewardship of Creation

The entire Bible is woven in and around an experience of the natural world, of what Christians call creation. The word creation is different from nature or environment. It implies an order and a purpose. Christians believe that humans are co-responsible for creation, that it has been entrusted to our wisdom and care, inadequate as these have often been. We are stewards of creation.

A central belief of scripture is not that God is confined to the world of nature, but that God is unknowable without it. Creation is God's sacred text. Simone Weil once wrote that the whole world is like a white stick in the hand of a blind person. It is given to us to compensate for our poor vision.

A good place to start is not at the beginning but at a point halfway through the Hebrew Scriptures, which used to be

known pejoratively as the Old Testament. Here we encounter the less well-known books of Ezra and Nehemiah which record the return of the people to their homeland after a long and bitter period as refugees. This experience of exile followed the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple by the Babylonian King Nebuchadnezzar around 600 BCE. Ezra, a priest and scribe, was a major figure in the cultural restoration that began with their return around 537 BCE. The sorrow of the exiled people is captured in a famous Psalm. Thanks to the group Boney M it may well be the most recognisable of all the psalms:

*By the rivers of Babylon—*

*there we sat down and there we wept*

*when we remembered Zion.*

*On the willows there*

*we hung up our harps. (Psalm 137)*

The people had lost possessions, sacred places, language and self-determination, most of the things that create cultural identity. The one thing they still had was their story. Scholars suspect that this was the point at which the educated Ezra began to piece together a series of stories that had long been told in several different languages, using several different words for the name of God and exploring widely diverse accounts of sacred experience.

On return from exile, the people now had a new book and Ezra read to them from it, taking all day to do so. This book was to be the touchstone for their self-understanding and, with that, understanding of God. It has a few different names, but most common is Torah. Christians might know it as The Pentateuch, the first five books of The Bible. The philosopher Spinoza (1632-

1677) was the first in a long line of thinkers to have identified Ezra as the editor although the scholar John Barton notes 'it is inconceivable that the earlier stories and some of the old laws in Genesis or Exodus respectively had to wait for Ezra in order to become official, national literature.' The Deuteronomistic history, for example, had a long-standing authority. Ezra created the architecture in which those stories have been housed for centuries. He built a house for homeless people. This was possible the most significant work of editorship in the whole of human history. It is no coincidence that the work was created, at least figuratively, under willows on the banks of a river. His stewardship took place as part of creation.

The first five books of the bible are deeply concerned with land and the right way to exercise stewardship not from an anthropocentric viewpoint standing outside creation, but as a part of the world and all it contains. The great overture, the pre-history in the first eleven chapters of Genesis, were, like all overtures, assembled towards the end of the period of composition and give voice to the themes and melodies that are about to be developed. They contain no historical figures. The only unmythical thing within them is Earth. We begin, in chapter one, with the ordering of creation and the repeated endorsement of it as 'good.'

Next, in Chapter 2, a new palette of thought and language introduces Adam, whose name means Earthling. The human is fashioned from the stuff of nature. Then the humans are given 'stewardship' over all that exists, a charge that has tragically, throughout history, been misinterpreted as 'dominion' or an invitation to take exploitative control. Humans are asked to name

the creatures, a call to enter a familial relationship with them rather than boss them around.

Almost immediately, we find that humans can't respect their status as a part of creation rather. They want the complete knowledge that could only come from having a standpoint outside creation. So, they are exiled from the garden. Sin, or estrangement from God, is closely akin to estrangement from the natural world. Before we know it, Cain, a man who tilled the soil, has killed his brother Abel, a keeper of flocks. The pair are identified though their relationship with nature: one a farmer, the other a grazier. Ecologists sometimes interpret this scene as expressing the wisdom of accepting what is on earth (keeping animals) rather than digging it up to plant. This is one way of explaining what seems to be a random choice of God's behalf. Cain hears the words 'your brother's blood cries out from the ground.'

Estrangement deepens and deepens until the earth is flooded. The wonderful story of Noah and the ark shows how a fresh start with humanity involves a fresh start in our entire relationship with nature. Every type of creature is allowed a place on the ark. A dove returns with an olive branch so that Noah knows safe land is near at hand. A rainbow in the sky marks a new relationship with God, 'now and for all future generations.' Noah lives, we are told, for 950 years, longer than any natural person but as long as many trees. A new world order begins with a new command to be respectful and responsible stewards of all creation.

It would not be difficult to read the whole of scripture and underline hundreds of moments where human stewardship for creation is the place in which God is encountered. The passage of the people out of captivity begins with a burning bush in the

wilderness, continues through seven plagues of nature, crosses a sea, wanders in a desert and receives the law that will guide their lives at daybreak in a storm from a mountain. The sense of nature that surrounds the theophany on Mount Sinai is overwhelming. It is curious that Mt Sinai is the shortest mountain in Africa: the law comes from a place that is not too high above Earth.

The spirituality of scripture is, in the words of today, inherently environmental. Dozens of Psalms make this connection, including Psalm 8, Psalm 29, Psalm 46, Psalm 84, Psalm 96, Psalm 104, Psalm 146, psalm 148 and plenty of others besides:

*O God, you are my God; I seek you;*

*my soul thirsts for you;*

*my flesh faints for you,*

*as in a dry and weary land where there is no water.* (Psalm 63)

The prophets are also replete with this kind of imagery, from Jeremiah's hole beside the Euphrates to Elijah's cave to Ezekiel's valley of dry bones. Ezekiel compares the whole community to a giant cedar growing from a small shoot, such that it provides shelter form every bird (Ezekiel 17: 22-24). For Isaiah, nature provides a metaphor for the way God works:

*For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven*

*and do not return there until they have watered the earth,*

*making it bring forth and sprout,*

*giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater,*

*so shall my word be that goes out from my mouth;*

*it shall not return to me empty,*

*but it shall accomplish that which I purpose*

*and succeed in the thing for which I sent it.* (Isaiah 55)

\*

The same themes emerge during the most heartbreaking part of scripture, the death of Jesus because of woefully inadequate human justice and the manipulation of fear and politics.

Christians believe that the cross is the most intimate and intense expression of the love of God for all creation. We believe that the universe, in all its mystery, is an expression of God's own self. The cross of Jesus, an image of giving, is the place we begin to understand God.

The Bible uses many images from nature to describe the death of Jesus. We speak of the wood of the cross and of Jesus being nailed to a tree. Hebrews speaks of the first tree and the second tree: the mythical tree of Adam brought death; the historical tree of Jesus led to life.

Scripture describes the Garden of Gethsemane, the Mount of Olives, darkness covering the land and an earthquake that took place when Jesus died. We think of water flowing from the side of Jesus. The body of Jesus is placed in a tomb newly hewn from rock. Throughout his life, Jesus' teaching was deeply entwined with nature. All this reminds us that the suffering of Jesus is at one not just with the suffering of all humanity but also with the struggle of creation. It makes visible what St Paul describes as 'the whole of creation groaning in one great act of giving birth' (Rom 8). That is why the value of stewardship calls us to treat all people with dignity as we work with reverence towards the healing of our planet. Creation is not just a stage on which humans perform. It is the performance of which we are cast members.

Caritas Australia respects the way in which the sacred nature of creation is expressed in all the great religions of the world. This includes the ways in which our First Nations spiritualities reflect a deep connection to land, people, and spirit. For millennia, stewardship of creation on this land we now call Australia was done with respect for land, water, animals and plants informed by dreaming stories and kept safe by elders.

We all share the same hope for a world made new and an end to exploitive relationships with Earth. Jesus, as part of creation himself, shows us a way to give rather than take. Earth is not there for our taking. We are its stewards.

\*

Pope Francis' famous letter, *Laudato Si* (2015), is likewise soaked in scripture. Chapter Two brings together scriptural, environmental and economic dimensions of stewardship. It is beyond the scope of this little book to explore it fully, but that chapter in particular rewards slow and meditative reading.

Here are just seven quotes if you'd like to devote just one week to spending five minutes a day thinking about them and allowing them to reach a deeper place within you. Each has a clear connection with the value of stewardship:

**Sunday:** This responsibility for God's earth means that human beings, endowed with intelligence, must respect the laws of nature and the delicate equilibria existing between the creatures of this world, for "he commanded, and they were created; and he established them for ever and ever; he fixed their bounds and he set a law which cannot pass away" (Ps 148:5b-6).

**Monday:** The laws found in the Bible dwell on relationships, not only among individuals but also with other living beings. "You shall not see your brother (or sister's) donkey or ... ox fallen down by the way and withhold your help... If you chance to come upon a bird's nest in any tree or on the ground, with young ones or eggs and the mother sitting upon the young or upon the eggs; you shall not take the mother with the young" (Dt 22:4, 6). Along these same lines, rest on the seventh day is meant not only for human beings, but also so "that your ox and your donkey may have rest" (Ex 23:12). Clearly, the Bible has no place for a tyrannical anthropocentrism unconcerned for other creatures.

**Tuesday:** Our insistence that each human being is an image of God should not make us overlook the fact that each creature has its own purpose. None is superfluous. The entire material universe speaks of God's love, his boundless affection for us. Soil, water, mountains: everything is, as it were, a caress of God.

**Wednesday:** The history of our friendship with God is always linked to particular places which take on an intensely personal meaning; we all remember places, and revisiting those memories does us much good. Anyone who has grown up in the hills or used to sit by the spring to drink, or played outdoors in the neighbourhood square; going back to these places is a chance to recover something of their true selves.

**Thursday:** A sense of deep communion with the rest of nature cannot be real if our hearts lack tenderness, compassion and concern for our fellow human beings. It is clearly inconsistent to combat trafficking in endangered species while remaining completely indifferent to human trafficking, unconcerned about

the poor, or undertaking to destroy another human being deemed unwanted. This compromises the very meaning of our struggle for the sake of the environment.

**Friday:** It is no coincidence that, in the canticle in which Saint Francis praises God for his creatures, he goes on to say: “Praised be you my Lord, through those who give pardon for your love”. Everything is connected. Concern for the environment thus needs to be joined to a sincere love for our fellow human beings and an unwavering commitment to resolving the problems of society.

**Saturday:** Whether believers or not, we are agreed today that the earth is essentially a shared inheritance, whose fruits are meant to benefit everyone. For believers, this becomes a question of fidelity to the Creator since God created the world for everyone. Hence every ecological approach needs to incorporate a social perspective which takes into account the fundamental rights of the poor and the underprivileged.



## Chapter Six

### Stewardship and governance

In his memoir, *Surrender* (2022), the singer Bono shares many stories about his work for justice around the world. It makes fascinating reading. He dealt with an impressive list of world leaders: from Bill Clinton to George W Bush to Barack Obama to Nelson Mandela to Angela Merkel to Melinda Gates to Princess Diana and so on and on. He played a significant role in advocating debt forgiveness for impoverished nations at the turn of the millennium and securing access for retroviral drugs in the context of the AIDS pandemic. Some of his stories are funny. He met St John Paul II when the latter was in poor health near the end of his days. The pope actively supported the millennium development goals.

He asked to borrow Bono’s famous sunglasses and put them on ‘with a devilish grin’. The resulting photo never saw the light of day until John Paul II died six years later.

Despite access to so many of the world's leaders, Bono became acutely aware of what he calls 'the white messiah complex.' It is one thing for superstars such as himself to travel the world, twisting the arms of the great and mighty, securing publicity and money for justice causes. As time goes by, he realised that addressing poverty is complex and one of the core issues is governance. Nothing much will change unless there are structures and governments in which people are enabled only to act for the common good.

Bono quotes the Zambian-born economist Dambisa Moyo. 'Aid at its worst can prop up governments that are not accountable to their own people.' He continues:

*The Sudanese-born businessman tells me there is a one-word answer to the challenge of development and the quest for more equal prosperity within and between counties. The word is 'governance.' No success can last without it, he says.*

This is not the place to examine why it suits some rich nations to support flimsy political structures in poor ones. Nor is it acceptable to say simplistically 'it is all their own fault because their governments are so dysfunctional.'

The point is simply that stewardship rests on effective and transparent governance. Stewardship is seldom flashy or dramatic. It doesn't make headlines in the way that other values at caritas, such as Courage and Compassion, sometimes will. Yet the effectiveness of our work rests on having the structures that ensure communities can grow and that we do not inadvertently reinforce the very situations that create vast disparity. Bono writes:

*It turns out that the fight for justice comes down to boring words that don't look good on a T-shirt:*

*Competence*

*Governance*

*Transparency*

*Accountability*

*Words that bring transformation.*

*The non-shouty words. The quiet words that turn the world right way up.*

In her book, *Deep Governance Matters* (2023), Kathleen Donnellon does not often use the word 'stewardship.' Yet the word very much underpins her reflection on many years of experience on the boards, and as a board chair, of not-for-profit organisations. Clear, appropriate and functional governance is the way we exercise stewardship of our mission. 'Your mission,' she writes, 'is your reason for being.' It is the priceless history, insight, understanding and vision of which we are stewards.

*Governance is not an end in itself: it is the tool we use to achieve effective outcomes. It is our governance processes that ultimately enable us to make the mission-based decision that supports rather than encumbers our strategic plan. Governance is not more important than mission. It's there to support mission (and to support the effective running of the organisation as a whole). But without good governance processes, mission is at risk. And if mission fails, the whole thing fails.*

*Mission is our why. Governance is our how. We are stewards of both the why and the how.*

It is worth recalling that the word governance owes its origin to the sea. It comes from the Latin word for piloting or steering a ship, something that requires skill in both good weather and bad. If you think of an ocean-going ship these days, ask who the steward is. It is not the person serving drinks to tourists in first class. It is the crew that navigates the course to a desired destination.



## Chapter Seven

### Stewardship and gratitude

I was once a member of a community built around homeless people which survived on the smell of an oily rag. At one stage we needed legal advice, and a friend of the community referred us to his friend, a partner in a well-known firm. The man was late returning from lunch, so we waited in the lounge of an impressive office suite.

We had sent the man all the necessary documentation, but he had not found time to read it. We waited on the other side of his desk as he did so. The meeting lasted about an hour and a half. We were then presented with an account for a sum which was, in those days, only a little less than the monthly salary of a primary school teacher. I called, thinking there must have been an error, and eventually he rang back.

‘I worked hard to get to where I am in the profession,’ he explained.



The unspoken implication was that he was a self-made man and entitled to charge what he liked.

The conversation limped along for a while, but we were clearly on parallel tracks.

There is no doubt that the man, a partner in a prestigious firm, had worked hard to reach the dizzy heights which, at that stage, were off limits to everyone except white men with nice suits and decent cellars.

His mistake was thinking that his success belonged to him alone.

‘I am sorry you don’t value what I bring to the table,’ he said.

I wondered if he valued what everybody else brought to his table. He was working in a profession that rested on centuries of law making and jurisprudence. He went to a university which had been created by generations of investment and philanthropy. In those days, he didn’t even have to pay fees. He had grown up with all the support that a wealthy and ambitious family could provide. Indeed, whatever he may or may not have brought to the mythical table, that table was built by thousands of others. I discerned no sense of stewardship. Stewardship requires humility and gratitude.

\*

Stewardship, like the value of partnership, means we never work in isolation. Least of all from our roots.

Caritas Australia is a Catholic Organisation, and that important central aspect of our identity evokes a whole range of reactions. How can we be stewards of this tradition in an invitational way?

How can we make people welcome regardless of who they are? There are parts of the Catholic story that are alienating. Yet there is so much that is both beautiful and true. It has fed my mind and heart for fifty years and, I believe, challenged me to draw closer to God. It has kept me out of my depth for half a century. I am grateful for that.

Please allow me to use cheese to reflect on this question.

Try to imagine two different types of cheese.

The first is the most expensive cheese in the world. It is called Pule cheese and costs about \$2300 a kilogram, which means that few people put it on their sandwiches. They don’t stock it at most local supermarkets. It comes from a single nature reserve in Sebia and is made from the milk of donkeys. Apparently, it is not easy to milk a donkey so endless time and patience are required. On top of that, there are only 100 jennies of a certain type of species that are suitable and, although jennies don’t produce much milk (and then only seasonally), it takes 25 litres to produce a kilogram. In addition, the process of turning the milk into cheese is highly traditional and follows strict rules with which few cheesemakers are familiar. Nonetheless, it is said to be a mild and pleasant experience, and Novak Djokovic enjoys this Serbian delicacy. This may explain why his tennis career lasted so long. He had to pay the bill from his delicatessen.

The second type of cheese is what we call processed cheese. It is much cheaper than Pule cheese but not as tasty. In fact, it doesn’t have any taste at all. Each slice is the precise shape of a square sandwich and comes wrapped in plastic so it is easy to separate from the other slices in the pack. It is not easy to tell where the

plastic ends and the cheese begins. The slices look like large post it notes and, indeed, are a good substitute as they stick to walls and can be written on with marker pens. Probably best not to eat them after that, unless your walls are very clean.

What is the point of all this?

Well, the first cheese is a result of a long and venerable tradition. Pule cheese has been made the same way for at least 600 years. No part of the recipe has been altered. Pule cheese is what you get when you adhere inflexibly to tradition. It is beautiful but totally inaccessible. In the Christian world, it is the equivalent of people who says that you can't be a steward of scripture unless you know five variants of Hebrew and three of Greek. Or you can't understand theology without a whole list of special words which can only be used in certain context. Or you can't pray unless you have the right number of candles on the altar.

Processed cheese is the opposite. It is available everywhere, including on many famous hamburgers. It is what you get when you have nothing but process. No human being needs to be involved in that process other than to turn on the switch at the start. In the world of Spirituality, this is what you get when you replace a rich and transformative tradition with a few callow cliches such as 'do what's in your heart' or 'just be a good person.'

Stewardship takes place between these two extremes.

Being the steward of a tradition hardly means making it inaccessible in the way that the keepers of Pule cheese keep their special skills and resources very much to themselves. On the other hand, stewardship does not mean creating something colourless,

odourless and tasteless. There is a great deal of grit and colour in the Christian story which can never quite make it into neat slices for predictable burgers.

Caritas Australia's stewardship calls us to think a lot about the sacredness of all life. The word sacred comes from a Latin root that means 'cut off' or 'restricted'. Something is sacred when it is beyond the reach of short-term pragmatism. Instead, it is treated with reverence. For us, stewardship involves:

- An unconditional acceptance of the sacred dignity of all people.
- A humble appreciation of the mystery and beauty of creation and our place in it.
- A life of radical gratitude. We have nothing other than what has been given to us.
- An ability to surrender our personal ego when it is time to work for the common good.
- A joy that life itself does not begin and end with us and that we are part of a long, slow river.
- A search for deeper and deeper truth, often expressed in fewer and fewer words.
- An understanding of morality based on the belief that every life has a purpose.
- An unmovable hope in forgiveness, reconciliation and peace building.
- An ability to be silent, still. To be both lost and found in wonder.

- Courage to ask, knock, seek and beg on behalf of the most marginal people on Earth.
- Care for our common home.
- Wisdom in the ways we use resources entrusted to us.
- Faithfulness in our call to service.

## **THE TEA-TOWEL TEACHINGS OF ST EWARD, PATRON OF STEWARDSHIP.**

If St Eward ever existed, she would have been a highly valued and sometimes annoying member of her medieval community. She would have constantly reminded the sisters and brothers that everything they had was a gift with which they had been entrusted. It was their responsibility to pass it on to others.

She had twenty basic ideas that the community would have liked turned into a beautiful mosaic except that would have been a poor use of resources. Instead, her teachings were printed onto tea-towels, a reminder that theory needs to be put into practice.

1. Christian stewardship is a form of mission.
2. Christian stewardship is about service not status.
3. Christian stewardship looks for the best structure in which embody our mission to nurture it, share it and embed it in the life of Caritas.
4. Christian stewardship is about creating, maintaining and developing structures in which people and the planet can be healed and renewed.
5. Christian stewardship is both ethical and moral. It celebrates both *ethos* and *telos*.
6. Christian stewardship embraces efficient bureaucracy but goes further. It asks *who* we are and *why* we are.
7. Christian stewardship ensures civil compliance. It is not just about ticking boxes, fending off legal challenges and satisfying auditors. Done well, it will have all these consequences. But it needs to be done deeper if it is to be really done well. Christian stewardship goes beyond the notion of compliance to encompass authentic responsibility for the godly direction of our work.

8. Christian stewardship listens to experience and asks probing questions. It asks for the more, for what has been called the *magis*.
9. Christian stewardship considers a complex and nuanced bottom line. It knows there is another line under the bottom line, what we might call the space where God signs of on what we have done.
10. Christian stewardship is discerning as much as decision making. It is enlivened by *discreta caritas*, discerning love, more than narrow pragmatism. It asks for the gifts of the Holy Spirit. It is important that these organisations such as Caritas, our boards and staff, are led by the Spirit. Stewardship lends clarity, accessibility and accountability to our response to the Spirit.
11. Christian stewardship is an expression of hope more than optimism. Optimism is an expression of human emotion. Hope is a surrender to grace. Hope is active; optimism can be passive. Hope means we are drivers. We work hard. We create. If we become passengers of providence, then that is not really providence. Stewardship has calloused hands and sweaty brows.
12. Christian stewardship is always an expression of gratitude. Gratitude is shown in responsible stewardship of all our resources: material, natural and supernatural.
13. Christian stewardship is accountable and relational. The heart of Jesus' life was his relationship with God. This is a radical form of accountability. We are accountable both to God and to the people we serve.
14. Christian stewardship is scriptural. It appreciates biblical examples of responsibility, both good and not so good: Abraham, Jacob, Moses, Ruth, David, Ezekiel, Mary the mother of Jesus, Mary of Magdala, Peter and Paul.
15. Christian stewardship is Christological. Jesus did not use the word governance although he did set performance indicators

- for his friends! 'By this shall they know you!' Jesus used the expression 'the kingdom of God' or 'the reign of God' to create vivid pictures of the effect of stewardship. Christian leaders always stand at the foot of the cross, aware of the suffering of Christ among us. It knows too that the tomb is empty, and Christ is alive in the world. Christian stewardship is courageous.
16. Christian stewardship is incarnational. It acknowledges that in many countries civil laws have been created carefully and for good reasons. We do not comply with them grudgingly, just as we don't use the roads grudgingly. We comply with diligence. Mission is intrinsically linked to our civil context and to disparage one is to disparage the other. We live within those laws as people whose work is generative and creative, not reactionary.
  17. Christian stewardship is helped by many of the great manuals in the history of the church. Among these are The Rule of St Benedict and The Spiritual Exercises of St Ignatius. It knows that charismatic leaders were often followed by those who created safe structures. The letters of such people as Catherine McAuley and Mary Mackillop are especially powerful. They demonstrate stewardship on the road making a daily response to the changing needs of their time. These were among many women who governed on the move.
  18. Christian stewardship includes the ministry of teaching. It communicates our vision with patience and persistence.
  19. Christian stewardship faces outwards with authority because it faces inwards with integrity. Authority comes from the word 'to make grow.' It is the opposite of authoritarianism. Where do we find the credible authority we need? Part of the answer is the renewed importance we experience of integrity: of living and speaking from our hearts, not from our fears.
  20. Christian stewardship is accountable to those of least account.

## DAILY STEWARDSHIP: A SPIRITUAL PRACTICE

We are stewards of every day and hour of our lives and stewards in particular of the experience of the sacred in those moments. Here is a five- or ten-minutes practice that can help us be more aware of the gift of life that comes to us day in and day out.

Take a few minutes every day.

1. Slow down. Stop. Be still. Be present to this day, this hour, this moment. Listen for sounds. Breathe deeply.
2. The gifts of this day. Bring to mind the experiences of this day, big and small. Let them come back to you. Be gentle with yourself. Especially bring to mind the people you have encountered, even if just for a fleeting moment.
3. Gratitude for the gifts of this day. Everything comes to us as grace. Give thanks for the events of your life and for the people that you come across. Spend a moment with the people and experiences for which you find it difficult to be grateful.
4. How have I responded to the gifts of this day? Again, be gentle with yourself. Have you been open or closed, defensive or welcoming? To whom were you indifferent? By what were you frustrated. What made you excited, peaceful, disturbed, resolute, nervous, or bold?
5. Finally, be open to the future. Resolve to receive another day in peace and wonder. Make a decision to embrace the adventure of life, even if the day ahead seems humdrum. Make a decision to be true to yourself if some challenges lie before you.

Finally, end with a physical gesture such as the sign of the cross or simply opening your arms in welcome.

## A PRAYER FOR STEWARDS OF CREATION

God of all life,  
We thank you for the gift of creation,  
For the water that keeps us alive,  
For our food and shelter,  
All of which come from the generosity of Earth.

We thank you for the very air we breathe  
Which we share with every creature.  
May we take good care of Earth  
As our common home takes care of us.

May we work for justice for those  
Most hurt by damage to our environment.  
May we enjoy the beauty of nature  
And pray that it be treated with deeper respect.

Jesus asked us to learn from the lilies of the field  
And the birds of the air.  
We ask this in his name  
Amen.

## A BLESSING FOR A FINANCIAL STEWARDS

Let us give thanks for the real bottom line,  
The place where we think less of profit and loss,  
And more of gratitude and compassion.  
The world is full of columns and numbers and spreadsheets  
And God knows we need to attend to such matters  
Because injustice thrives in confusion,  
And power does not like to be made accountable.  
But none of us works for a line in a ledger.  
We work to make the world more whole.

Jesus knew a lot about money.

Thirty pieces of silver, one hundred denarii, the head of Caesar on a coin, the widow's mite, the workers who came late, the parable of the talents, the gold at his birth, the traders in the temple, the tax collector, the treasure in a field, the pearl of great price, the lots cast for his underwear, the rich young man who went away sad, the eye of a needle.

He built deep questions around such stories and images.

What are we making of the world? Why? How will we grow?  
The question 'who am I?' is answered in another: 'Who is your neighbour?'

May we be hungry rather than greedy.

Hungry for kindness and encounter.

Spendthrift of grace.

Reckoned by love.

Amen.

## A PRAYER FOR WISE STEWARDSHIP WHEN FACING A DECISION

Loving God, we find ourselves at a crossroads,  
Unsure which path to follow  
Desperate for both a compass and companions,  
Hungry for both hope and healing.  
Give us courage in our confusion,  
Humility to discard the maps we have sworn by,  
Peace in the face of anxiety  
As we ask the old question Ubi Caritas?  
Which means both 'where is love?'  
And 'where is love taking us?'  
Come Holy Spirit and fill our hearts.  
Renew the face of the earth.

Amen

‘It turns out that the fight for justice comes down to boring words that don’t look good on a T-shirt: Competence, Governance, Transparency, Accountability. Words that bring transformation. The non-shouty words. The quiet words that turn the world right way up.’

- Bono, Surrender

‘Prayer is attention.’

- Simone Weil, Waiting on God.



**Caritas**  
AUSTRALIA

End poverty  
Promote justice  
Uphold dignity