

Simple Living at St. Joseph

Possession Clutter

October 2003



Why do I buy things?

What do I own?

What owns me?

How can I steward my things?

What possessions distract me?

It is easy to slide into the consumer race and find out how much we can purchase for ourselves! But do all these goods leave us more humane, compassionate, and just? Are we free? Are we more grateful and generous? Are we truly joyful? Do we listen for the wind of the Spirit— and dance! A consumer culture is at odds with an economy of gifts. God’s graciousness to us is built upon the utter gratuity of God’s love, which we can neither buy nor earn.

The [U.S. Bishops’] pastoral letter on stewardship raises questions about how can we live in the light of the Gospel in a culture of consumerism and individualism run wild!

...Stewardship challenges us to ask why we spend money and accumulate things!

— Bishop Sylvester Ryan

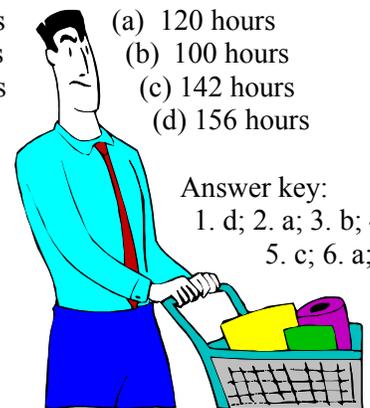
Simplicity does not mean getting rid of all your possessions, but rather integrating them with your life purpose.



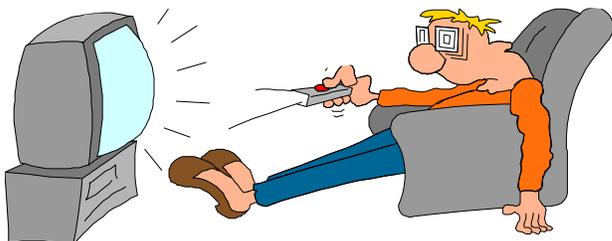
- ✓ Strangers say your house is “interesting.”
- ✓ You send a search party into your basement or garage—and they never return.
- ✓ You entertain dinner guests by showing them your old sock collection.
- ✓ You call an accumulation a collection.
- ✓ You have stacks of plant pots in the garage with mice nesting in them.
- ✓ You set your handbag down to write out a check and passersby toss trash into it.

● ● ● ● ● **Work & Spend & Work & Spend** ● ● ● ● ●

1. What is the amount of time the average American will spend watching TV commercials?
(a) 1 year of life (b) 3 years of life
(c) 5 years of life (d) 2 years of life
2. What is the number of TV commercials the average American child views per year?
(a) 40,000 (b) 35,000 (c) 25,000
(d) 43,000
3. What is the share of teenage girls who say they “love to shop?”
(a) 69% (b) 88% (c) 92% (d) 73%
4. What was the number of high schools compared to the number of shopping malls in the United States in 1996?
(a) 26,500 high schools to 28,500 malls
(b) 30,000 high schools to 24,000 malls
(c) 22,000 high schools to 35,000 malls
(d) 24,000 high schools to 42,130 malls
5. What was the percentage of mall shoppers surveyed across the country who were shopping for a specific item only?
(a) 35% (b) 65% (c) 25% (d) 40%
6. What was the average time per week spent shopping compared with the average amount of time spent playing with children in 1985?
(a) 6 hrs shopping to 40 min playtime
(b) 4 hrs shopping to 1 hr playtime
(c) 5 hrs shopping to 1.5 hrs playtime
(d) 3 hrs shopping to 45 min playtime
7. How many more hours per year did employed Americans spend on the job in 1994 than they did in 1973?
(a) 120 hours
(b) 100 hours
(c) 142 hours
(d) 156 hours



Answer key:
1. d; 2. a; 3. b; 4. d;
5. c; 6. a; 7. c



Adapted from
All-Consuming Passion
by New Road Map Foundation
and Northwest Environment
Watch, 1998.

TEACHINGS OF WORLD RELIGIONS AND MAJOR CULTURES ON CONSUMPTION

FROM *HOW MUCH IS ENOUGH?* BY ALAN THEIN DURNING

Religion/Culture

Teaching and Source

American Indian

“Miserable as we seem in thy eyes, we consider ourselves... much happier than thou, in this that we are very content with the little we have.” (Micmac Chief)



Buddhist

“Whoever in this world overcomes his selfish cravings, his sorrows fall away from him, like drops of water from a lotus flower.” (Dhammapada, 336)

Christian

It is “easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter into the Kingdom of God.” (Mt 19:23-24)



Confucian

“Excess and deficiency are equally at fault.” (Confucius, XI.15)



Ancient Greek

“Nothing in excess.” (inscribed at Oracle of Delphi)



Hindu

“That person who lives completely free from desires, without longing... attains peace.” (Bhagavad-Gita, II.71)

Islamic

“Poverty is my pride.” (Muhammad)



Jewish

“Give me neither poverty nor riches.” (Proverbs 30:8)

Taoist

“He who knows he has enough is rich.” (Tao Te Ching)



Before you acquire a possession, stop and ask yourself the following questions: Will this enhance my life and complement my goals? Do I really need this? Do I have a place in my life for this? If I delay, will I want this later?

The ‘stuff’ in our lives demands a lot—it needs to be cleaned, organized, repaired, insured, or financed. Free up time and energy by getting rid of the items you don’t need. Sell it, recycle it, donate it to charity, or throw it out.



from *Optum*, October 2002

A hummingbird threads its long, delicate bill onto the center of the flower, not even touching the petals, and sips its breakfast. A moment later it is gone, having drunk only what was necessary and leaving the flower pollinated.



Precise, efficient, agile, respectful: I think humanity can find no better teacher in the art of living. The lesson of the hummingbird is that beauty and nobility are to be found not in having more but in having just what is necessary.

—Eknath Easwaran,
from *In Context*, Summer 1990



Activities for reflecting on possessions

- While you are preparing dinner or waiting for that microwave to finish, spend a few minutes looking in cabinets and remove 3 to 5 canned goods that are in excess and drop them in the *Food for the Hungry* boxes at church.
- Looking at your bookshelves, which ones haven’t you read in awhile? Consider donating them to a local library, nursing home, or a charity organization.
- Ask your children to think about looking at the toys on their shelves they no longer play with. Donate them to a local organization that could distribute them to children less fortunate.
- Check out your wardrobe. When was the last time you wore that item of clothing? There are many local charitable organizations that could use them. Or, perhaps consider a consignment shop and then use the money to purchase good quality clothing, instead of the latest trendy items.



Oct. 4/5 • Why do I buy things?

It is said that we spend the first half of our life accumulating possessions, and the second half giving them away.

Why do we have to have so many things? Why do we buy things only to turn around and sell them at a garage sale for a fraction of the cost we paid for them?

- To feel good about ourselves?
- To “save money” (get a bargain)?
- To feel safe/secure?
- To have more or nicer things than someone else?

Do you recall purchasing something that you didn't really need? Why did you buy it?

Oct. 11/12 • What do I own? What owns me?

Henry David Thoreau once said that if he was dusting and came across an object in his path, he would toss the object rather than fool with it. I like this approach. This guy knew what he was talking about. Think about it. Our friend from Walden Pond had time to wander in nature, write books, and philosophize about life. What are the rest of us doing? Dusting; rearranging; insuring; shopping for stackable, color-coded storage units; renting storage space; buying houses with extra rooms and basements; worrying about our stuff; polishing; cleaning; repairing; selling at garage sales; and working overtime to buy our clutter!

from *The Simple Living Guide* by Janet Luhrs

Oct. 18/19 • How can I steward my things?

“Be generous, sharing what you have” (1 Tim 6:18).

We are all stewards—managers of the many gifts God has bestowed on us. Our challenge as Christians is to make good use of those gifts.

“Happiness lies more in giving than in receiving” (Acts 20:35).

Oct. 25/26 • What possessions distract me?

“We never buy more than we need. We never need more than we use. We never use more than it takes to get by ‘til we learn to need less.”

—Old Chinese saying

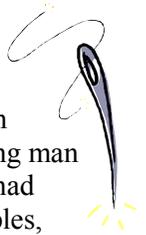
Some of our possessions can be a distraction to living the life God calls us to lead. Which of these things do we want to pass on to others for which they could be more life-giving?

Another Activity...

Take out paper and pen. How much do you earn per hour? Subtract a portion for taxes and other deductions. Look at an item in a room of your home that is seldom used but was the “had to have _____ (fill in the blank here) item”. Calculate your hourly wage times the amount of the item. How many hours did you have to work to pay for that item?

For example: Your hourly wage is \$20 per hour, subtracting for taxes, etc. your wage is then reduced to approximately \$14 per hour. The cost of the “item of the moment” was \$112. You just spent an eight hour day working to pay for that one item.

Jesus said to him, “If you wish to be perfect, go, sell your possessions, and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow me.” When the young man heard this word, he went away grieving, for he had many possessions. Then Jesus said to his disciples, “Truly I tell you, it will be hard for a rich person to enter the kingdom of heaven. Again I tell you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of God.” When the disciples heard this, they were greatly astounded and said, “Then who can be saved?” But Jesus looked at them and said, “For mortals it is impossible, but for God all things are possible.” (Matt 19:21-26)



Live simply that
others may simply
live



Contributors:
Eric Bertelsen
Paul Canavese
Russell Connacher
Anne Marie Fourré
Therese Hauer
David McGaffey
Doris Neuberger
Sandra Russum
Bill Smith
Mary Turowski



St. Joseph Community
Serving Alameda, CA
and surrounding areas



For more information about simple living at St. Joseph and available resources, see: www.stewardshipparish.org