



Tending Our Gardens

Stewardship in Everyday Life

“What have you done with the garden entrusted to you?” — Machado

Many are familiar with the phrase “time, talent, and treasure” as a description of Christian stewardship, and these are indeed important aspects of it. However, stewardship is much more. It entails accepting all aspects of our lives as gift, and inviting God into each.

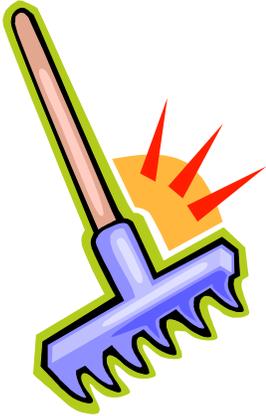
God cares deeply about how we take care of our bodies, emotions, and relationships. God wants us to use everything we have to bring about the Kingdom in our lives and the world around us.

Bishop Robert Morneau presents this idea of stewardship as different gardens that we are called to tend in our lives. This handout expands on his thoughts, as a guide for discernment.

This is a starting point: a tool to help you to begin asking your own questions. Only you can ultimately determine how God is calling you in your life.

This process should not necessarily be seen as a way of adding more tasks to your life, but as a call to balance and openness. Stewardship addresses what we do in our lives, but more importantly *how* we do them.

As you read through the questions, check off areas in which you would like to be more attentive or spend more energy. Feel free to also star questions related to areas where you are doing well. When you are done, go back and circle one to three areas you want to work on.



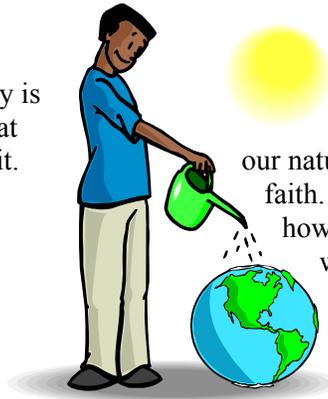


Garden of Our Body:

The physical garden

We sometimes forget that our physical body is a gift from God. St. Paul reminds us that our bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit. We may abuse our bodies, often with the excuse of doing more important things instead.

- Do you nourish yourself with a nutritious diet?
- Do you maintain a healthy body weight?
- Do you exercise regularly?
- Do you receive a healthy amount of sleep? Are you tired often?
- Do you care for yourself when you become ill? See a doctor at the appropriate times
- Do you make regular medical visits? Dental? Eye exams?
- Have you considered programs or practices for your body's health? For example: yoga, chiropractic sessions, exercise classes, regular walks.



Garden of the Globe:

The ecological garden

Ecology, concern for the environment, and responsible use of our natural resources are values rooted in our faith. The first book of the Bible reminds us how God entrusted the earth to us, so that we might be good caretakers. St. Francis was particularly aware of the presence of God in the world around us.

- Do you reuse and recycle the items that you use?
- Do you allow concern for the world to influence your purchasing decisions?
- Do you educate yourself about environmental issues?
- Is there a simple step you could take to reduce the impact you are having on the environment? Buying reusable grocery bags? Lowering your thermostat a little? Paying a little more for something recycled?
- Have you considered supporting organizations that protect land, animals, other wildlife, or the rest of the environment?



Garden of Family & Friends:

The social garden

Our relationships are precious gifts that we do not always nurture as much as we should. Sometimes the people we are closest to are the ones we hurt the most. Cultivating our relationships means being attentive, communicating, and showing

our love and commitment.

- Are there friends or family members you want to spend more time with?
- Is there someone you need to tell that you love (or tell more often)?
- Are you open to new friendships? Are you willing to take risks to reach out to others?
- Do you prioritize time with your family?
- Do you listen carefully when your friends or family are talking to you?
- Do you have unresolved issues with a family member or friend that is getting in the way of you loving them, or them loving you? One of your parents? Your children? Your spouse?
- Are there any friends or relatives you want to pray for?
- Do you make your relationship with your partner a priority, amidst children, jobs, chores, and all the other busyness?
- Are there steps you could take to have more fun with your family?

Garden of Choices:

The moral garden

It may seem unusual to consider decisions as gifts. Sometimes some of them may feel like curses. The opportunity to make choices, both large and small, is a great responsibility that we usually take for granted.

- Do we bring God into our decision making process? In your large decisions? In the small?
- Does your faith affect the decisions you make in a work environment?
- Have you considered spiritual direction or counseling to help discern how God is leading you to act in your life?
- Were there ten seconds today when God was challenging you to do something?
- Is there a significant decision you are being called to make in your life now?
- Do you act the way you want to in "the moment"? With the new people you come in contact with?
- What part of your life do you try to keep God out of?





Garden of Emotions:

The psychological garden

Our feelings and mental state are integral parts of us as human beings. Emotions are tricky things, as we all have different ways of dealing with them, some more healthy than others. A good place to start is to recognize our emotions as gifts from God that we are called to faithfully tend.

- Do you take time off before you get to a point of burnout?
- Do you ask your friends for support when you need it?
- Do you let your emotions build up to an unhealthy level?
- Do you let yourself have fun? Be happy? Be goofy? Often enough?
- Do you spend enough time alone?
- Have you considered counseling to help understand yourself better and move forward?
- Is there a particular emotion you have that you want to understand or handle better?

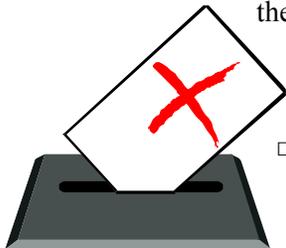


Garden of the City & Nation:

The political garden

We take for granted that we live in a country in which we can speak our minds and opinions. We can vote, and have people who represent us in our government. We have a tremendous amount of influence when we work together as a city, state, or country, or simply pick up a telephone. These are all gifts that we must use wisely.

- Do you vote in all elections?
- Do you consider how your faith could influence your political decisions?
- Have you ever contacted a company to influence their decisions for a better world?
 - Do you inform yourself about political issues? Local, city, state, country, and worldwide?
 - What political issues are most important to you? Have you ever contacted one of your representatives to influence them on any of these issues?
- Have you considered what small steps you can take to create a more just world? Large steps?



Garden of the "Chip":

The technological garden

We live in a vastly different world from the one of just fifty years ago. Our technological advances allow us to both heal people more effectively, and kill them more effectively. It is our choice daily in how we want to use the gifts of technology surrounding us.



- When you use email, do you do so in a way that enhances your relationships or detracts from them?
- Are you being called to learn more about some form of technology?
- Do you have access to tools that God might want to you use for a special project? A computer? A digital camera? A car?
- Do you use technology in your life to become a fuller person?

Garden of History:

The historical garden

God calls us to understand our past and use that knowledge for a better future. The Bible tells of our experiences as God's people through history, in our failures and triumphs. Some of us are more aware than others of the gift that each new day is.

- Do you stay informed about recent history ("current events") through media sources?
- Do you take advantage of books, documentaries, and other resources that give us perspective on history?
- Do you consider history and news critically, and how you can make a difference in the world?
- Do you share your personal stories with others, particularly those in newer generations?
- Do you regularly reflect on your own life and what you have learned from your personal experiences?
- Do you reflect on where you have experienced Christ daily?
- Have you had some experience that you have a responsibility to act on?



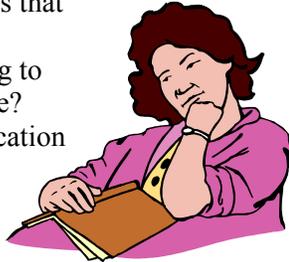


Garden of the Mind:

The intellectual garden

Science tells us that we only take advantage of a small part of the capabilities of our minds. We can develop our God-given mental capacities in a variety of ways, but we can be sure that God wants us to grow.

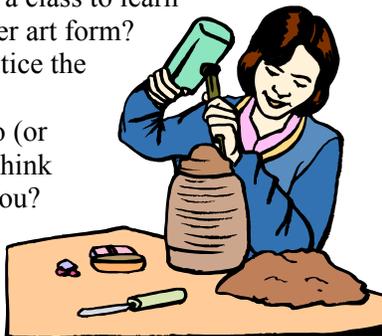
- Have you considered taking a class at an adult school, parks & rec. department, or community college?
- Do you ask friends, family members, or co-workers to teach you new things?
- Do you participate in activities that keep your mind sharp?
- Have you considered returning to school for a diploma or degree?
- With the intelligence and education with which you have been gifted, how is God calling you to serve?



Garden of the Arts: *The cultural garden*

Our world would be a dull place without the many arts, which includes many visual arts, music, drama, poetry, literature, dance, and many others. We are called to support and explore artistic creativity, both what we personally have and those of others with particular gifts.

- Do you want to spend more time developing a particular artistic talent?
- Do you support art in your local community?
- Is there an artistic form that you've always wanted to try?
- Would you like to take a class to learn music, dance, or another art form?
- Do you take time to notice the art around you?
- Do you stop to listen to (or read) those lyrics you think might be speaking to you?

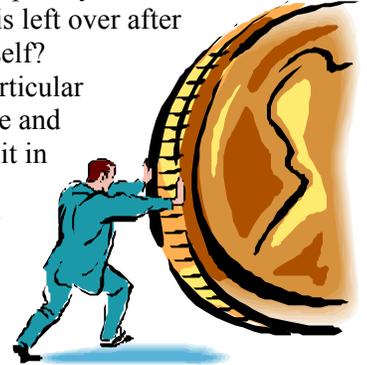


Garden of Money and Supplies:

The economic garden

A central insight of stewardship is that the material "possessions" we have are not really ours. They belong to God, who has entrusted them to us so we can nurture, tend, and share them. How does God want us to use these gifts?

- Are you too attached to any possessions? What would you not be able to walk away from?
- Do you give "from the top" of your material gifts, or from whatever is left over after you have spent on yourself?
- Has God given you a particular item so that at some time and some place you can use it in the way God intended?
- How do you invest your material gifts for a greater return?
- Do you financially support local, national, and world charities?



Garden of the Soul:

The spiritual garden

How do you answer when you are asked if you have a "personal relationship with your Lord and Savior Jesus Christ"? All relationships take commitment, effort, time, and communication to be healthy and grow.

- Does God miss you? Do you regularly spend the time you want to with God?
- Do you make retreats?
- Do you take advantage of liturgies, workshops, and other opportunities to grow in your spirituality?
- Do you pray regularly? As much as you would like?
- Do you use prayer, fasting, and almsgiving to cultivate your relationship with God? Do you spend time just listening to God?

