

Stewardship called ‘practical spirituality’ that follows Jesus’ example

EDEN PRAIRIE, Minn. – If you think stewardship is just a fancy way a parish asks for more in the collection basket, Father Daniel Mahan invites you to think again.

“Stewardship is much more important than money, much more valuable than silver or gold,” the priest from Indiana said. “Holiness is our goal. Stewardship is a practical spirituality that gets us there.”

Stewardship calls people to imitate Jesus in his generous self-giving, he added, “and when we do that, we become more Christ-like. We grow in holiness.”

Father Mahan, executive director of the Center for Catholic Stewardship at Marian University in Indianapolis, offered a vision of stewardship as spirituality as the keynote address during the recent stewardship conference of the Archdiocese of St. Paul and Minneapolis.

More than 250 from around the archdiocese and neighboring dioceses attended the annual gathering at Pax Christi in Eden Prairie.

To take up “Stewardship as a Way of Life,” which was the conference theme, and to help build vibrant and engaged parishes and communities, growing in holiness is key, Father Mahan said.

“It’s a day-by-day turning away from sin and turning toward Jesus Christ,” he said. An aid for doing that could be opening the Bible and reading the Scripture passages for the day’s Mass. Prayer of that nature has three aims: to be close to the Lord, to be close to the church, and to gain a keen sense of mission, purpose and direction in life.

“It is no accident God has put us here in this place at this time with these people,” he said. “Everyone has a role to play in the building up of the kingdom, and nobody

else can do it like you are called to.”

The U.S. bishops identified four prime elements to stewardship when they wrote a pastoral letter on the subject, Father Mahan said.

- Gratitude: A steward knows everything is from the Lord, so a steward is grateful. Father Mahan noted, “You cannot be both grateful and unhappy at the same time.”
- Responsible: A steward takes care of God’s blessings.
- Generous: It is very natural to hold on to God’s gifts exactly the way God wants us to: loosely.
- To return with increase: As in the Gospel parable of the master who gave money to his servants and returned expecting that they would have grown that investment, there will come a day when each of us will have to render an account to the master, Father Mahan said. God will ask: “What did you do with your life? With your time, your talent and your opportunities? What did you do with all that money that passed through your hands?”

Building on the bishops’ points, Father Mahan said that when stewardship is taught and learned, people attain a greater sense of living one’s mission out in the world.

“Stewardship is about your parish, but it’s more,” the priest said. The primary place lay Christians are to witness to their faith, to make a difference, is out beyond the doors of the church, beginning with the family and extending to the workplace, the school, the community and the world.

“Wherever you have influence in the world, you are called to do what cannot be done by anyone else, to bring the Gospel of Jesus Christ into the world.

“Stewardship is not just something good for our parishes,” Father Mahan added. “Stewardship is something that will transform the world. Through stewardship, the face of Jesus will shine forth in the world.”

In that way, stewardship and evangelization are like fraternal twins, he said. Stewardship builds up parishes, builds up the church and naturally draws others

into the life of Christ.

Because stewards are the living body and blood of Jesus out in the world, stewardship is a eucharistic spirituality, Father Mahan said.

Having been nourished at the eucharistic table, he said, pointing to the altar in the worship space at Pax Christi: "Take what you have received and be a great steward in your words, deeds and works of mercy."

In welcoming attendees to the conference, Archbishop John C. Nienstedt called stewardship "central to our call to be the Lord's disciples," and said those who practice stewardship "have a keen sense of what it means to give back to God."

He told the gathering, "Stewards know that they are not the owner, user or exploiter of the resources God has put at our disposal, but that God's gifts are to be used in service to all God's children."

All have an innate spiritual desire to give of ourselves, the archbishop noted.

"You are called to be a leaven in your homes, in your parishes and in your communities."