

When we speak of stewardship and family we must also consider stewardship *of* family. Most often, we stress the importance of stewardship of the great gifts of God's material world, but which of God's gifts is greater than family?



Throughout our life's journey, our family will take many forms. For a child, the family is parents, siblings, grandparents, cousins, godparents and individuals with significant roles in the child's life. As we mature, we become stewards of our parents as they also are of us. We are stewards of our siblings, aunts, uncles, cousins and more. We are called to encourage and support our family members to grow in the faith. We are also called to encourage and support them in developing their God-given gifts and talents to the full for the glory of God. If we are blessed with a spouse, our concept of family expands and our stewardship of family expands with it.

As our role within our family evolves, we become stewards of the authority and influence which we hold in the family. This requires balance tempered by love and respect. A spouse or parent with authority must also relate to family members with respect and humility. St. Paul writes to the Ephesians, "Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ" (5:21). St. Paul further instructs us, "Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her" (5:25). And in Colossians 3:21, St. Paul instructs, "Parents, do not embitter your children, or they will become discouraged."

We are stewards of our family through the influence that we have upon them. This influence may be for good or for evil. In *The Moral Intelligence of Children*, Robert Coles writes, "...the child is an ever-attentive witness of grown-up morality – or lack thereof; the child looks and looks for cues as to how one ought to behave, and finds them galore as we parents and teachers go about our lives, making choices, addressing people, showing in action our rock-bottom assumptions, desires, and values, and thereby telling those young observers much more than we may realize." We exercise our stewardship of family by our actions more than our words.

Throughout our lives and the roles we assume within the family, we are stewards of the love, authority, trust and respect that exist among members of the family. Unlike material possessions, these are not diminished by use. But if mishandled, they can be lost. Love, authority, trust and respect require the most diligent stewardship, because once they are lost, they are most difficult to recover.

The Divine Liturgy of Saint Basil the Great includes beautiful silent prayers expressing the Church's concern for the family: "...remember, Lord, the people here present and those that are absent with good cause. Have mercy on them and on us according to the multitude of your mercy, fill their store-houses with every good thing; maintain their marriage-bonds in peace and concord; nurture the infants; instruct the young, strengthen the aged, encourage the faint-hearted, gather together again those that are scattered; bring back those who went astray and unite them to Your holy, catholic and apostolic church; defend the widows; protect the orphans..."

As Orthodox Christians, we are also stewards of our Church family – those with whom we worship, fellowship and serve the community. In the same way that we care for our immediate family, we also care for our Christian brothers,

sisters, fathers, mothers, sons and daughters. In his book on the Eucharist/Divine Liturgy, Fr Alexander Schmemmann explains that in the early church, the Eucharistic sacrifice was offered by all the members of the church. Each person coming to the gathering of the Church brought with them everything they could spare for the needs of the Church. This meant for the sustenance of the clergy, widows and orphans, for helping the poor, and for all the good works of the Church. This is the Church that we as Orthodox Christians claim to be.



In the Gospel of Saint Matthew (6:19), Jesus instructs us, "Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal..." Often in life, we pursue and collect those things that do not last. We must ask, "One hundred years from now, where will our possessions be?" Our greatest blessing is our family. As Orthodox Christians, we are called to be stewards of this great gift. If we are faithful to this calling, perhaps our Lord will say to us as he did to the faithful steward, "Well done good and faithful servant" (Mt 25:23).

Christian Stewardship Is...

...learning how to be a responsible and concerned caretaker of Christ's Church; it is learning how to enjoy Church life and be happy in Church work, for in Her dwells the fullness of the Spirit of God.

...our active commitment to use all our time, talent and treasure for the benefit of humankind in grateful acknowledgment of Christ's redeeming love.

...caring for the needs of others.

...offering one's self to God as He offered Himself to us.

...what a person does after saying "I believe..." , as proof of that belief.

...devotion and service to God and His Church as persons, as families, as parish, as diocese/metropolis, as national Church and as Church universal.

From Oriented Leadership by Williams & McKibben



St. Athanasius Orthodox Church
300 Sumida Gardens Lane
Santa Barbara, CA 93111
805-685-5400
office@stathanasius.org
www.stathanasius.org

From God
every family in heaven
and on earth is named.

Ephesians 3:15



Stewardship Ministry