



### Pastoral Statement on Stewardship

*“As each one has received a gift, use it to serve one another as good stewards of God’s varied graces.” (1 Pet.4:10)*

Dear People of God,

We mark this year the 500<sup>th</sup> year of the coming to our shores of the Christian Faith. Our commemoration of the event is an acknowledgment of this immense gift to our people and our land. We did not only receive the Faith, but also allowed it to take root and grow in our Filipino culture throughout these years. With this gift of Faith, we have become God’s people, partakers of “divine mysteries” (1 Cor 4:1). We are grateful to God for this immeasurable gift.

We are not, however, the ultimate owners of this special gift. We are ‘stewards’ - *‘katiwala’ (tinugyanan, katalek)* of God’s gifts. *‘Is there anything that we did not receive as gift?’* (Cf. 1 Cor. 4:7). Each gift we receive is meant to be shared to one another. And so, ‘we are gifted to give’; we must share the Faith.

Every gift is a responsibility. We recognize every gift, nurture it, generously share it with others, and gratefully return it with increase to the Lord. This is the meaning of the Spirituality of Stewardship.<sup>1</sup>

After five centuries of striving to live the Christian Faith more fully, we heighten consciousness of our identity as stewards. We are stewards of life, talent, time and material resources. These gifts are given to us for service, that we may become channels of God’s Providence to one another. The Holy Scriptures remind us: *“as each one has received a gift, use it to serve one another as good stewards of God’s varied grace”* (1 Peter 4:10). We are certainly blessed not only when we receive, but especially when we give.

God calls us to serve one another more generously, especially our poor brothers and sisters. The Lord Jesus made his own the prophecy of Isaiah, *“the Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring glad tidings to the poor”* (Lk. 4:18). We, then, take the banner of preferential love for the poor. On this, Pope Francis tells us: *“Our preferential option for the poor must mainly translate into a privileged and preferential religious care”* (Evangeli Gaudium #200).

In this spirit, we re-affirm the mandate given us by the Second Plenary Council of the Philippines (PCP II) in 1991, namely: *“tithing,<sup>2</sup> after a good pastoral catechesis, shall be introduced with the end in view of the gradual abolition of the Arancel System”* (PCP II Decree #118).

The *‘arancel’*, which is the fixed amount asked for services given in our churches, can be a hindrance for the poor to receive God’s grace and blessings. Let us do our best,

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<sup>1</sup>This was eloquently expounded by the USCCB (United States Conference of Catholic Bishops) in their 1992 Pastoral Letter entitled, “Stewardship, A Disciple’s Response”.

<sup>2</sup>By tithing, we refer, not necessarily to the Biblical notion of ten per cent of one’s earnings, but to various models of making regular voluntary pledges, sometimes also called *“Balik-Handog.”* Our BECs (basic ecclesial communities), have set a good example in this regard. Like them, we hope our traditional parishes would be able to draw inspiration from the example of the early Christian communities, as attested in Acts 2:44-45.

then, to remove obstacles to genuine service, especially to the poor. For in the end, *'each of us will give an account of ourselves to God'* (Romans 14:12). And we heed the Lord Jesus' instruction to his disciples as he sent them on mission: *"Without cost you have received; without cost you are to give"* (Mt. 10:8).

Therefore, we, as Church in the Philippines, once more commit ourselves to the gradual abolition of the *arancel system*. This is a concrete step in renewing ourselves in the practice of stewardship, praying that others may see us truly *"as good stewards of God's varied graces"* (1 Pet. 4:10).

We commit ourselves to education, formation and catechesis in the Spirituality of Stewardship for our clergy, religious and laity in our dioceses, parishes, communities and families, in view of adopting a concrete stewardship program in our dioceses to replace the *arancel system* as soon as possible. In view of this, we will also put up a service arm that will concretely assist the dioceses that are having a difficulty in implementing this program. We envision local churches, parishes and BECs (Basic Ecclesial Communities) sustained by a generous sharing of resources, where those who have none are not left out of spiritual and material care, where stewardship is a way of life. This is a true image of the Church.

Brothers and sisters, we are all part of this endeavor for we all belong to the Church, the one family of God. We all share responsibility for the Church. Thus, we encourage all the baptized to regularly, wholeheartedly and generously contribute to the Church so that we can fulfill our common mission of spreading the Good News, of serving humanity and caring for the whole of creation. For *'the earth is the Lord's, and everything in it, the world and all who live in it'* (Psalm 24:1).

Let us not be afraid to give freely and cheerfully, even in times of crisis and difficulty like the Covid-19 pandemic that we are presently experiencing. Let us sustain the spirit of generosity that has spontaneously overflowed during this pandemic and has kept our communities in operation. We will look back with amazement and gratitude at these times, wondering how we got by even at the height of the lockdowns that we thought would seriously challenge the sustainability of our parishes.

St. Paul reminds us: *"God is able to make every grace abundant for you, so that in all things, always having all you need, you may have an abundance for every good work"* (2 Cor. 9:8). May we not waver in our trust in God, for He never fails to provide for our needs. In all things, let God be our priority. Did not the Lord Jesus himself assure us: *"seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be given you besides?"* (Mt. 6:33).

For the Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines:

  
+ ROMULO G. VALLES, D.D.  
Archbishop of Davao  
CBCP President  
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