

Stewardship: The Identity of the Catholic School in the 21st Century

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ABSTRACT

Catholic schools have a long and rich history, rooted in the teachings of Jesus Christ and the Catholic Church. In the 21st century, they continue to provide quality education while upholding their distinctive Catholic identity. One defining characteristic of Catholic schools is stewardship, which involves responsible management of resources, fostering the development of students, and commitment to the common good. This theological paper explores stewardship as a crucial component of Catholic school identity in the 21st century. It examines the historical development of Catholic schools, the biblical and magisterial foundations of stewardship, and the challenges and opportunities posed by technological advancements, cultural shifts, environmental issues, and financial sustainability. The paper advocates for a comprehensive approach to address these challenges, incorporating technology, promoting environmental education, ensuring economic sustainability, fostering cultural competence, and forging community partnerships.

Keywords: Catholic schools, stewardship, responsible management, resources, common good, technological advancements, cultural shifts, environmental issues

INTRODUCTION

Catholic schools have a long and rich history, dating back to the early centuries of the Christian Church. They have played a significant role in developing and transmitting knowledge, values, and faith in many societies worldwide. Rooted in the teachings of Jesus Christ and the Catholic Church, these institutions have continuously evolved to respond to the needs of their communities while maintaining their distinctive Catholic identity.

In the 21st century, Catholic schools continue to provide quality education to millions of students, regardless of socioeconomic background or religious beliefs. They are known for their commitment to academic excellence, spiritual formation, and the development of the whole person – intellectually, morally, and socially. Amidst the challenges of modern society, such as secularization, technological advancements, and globalization, Catholic schools strive to remain relevant and uphold the values that have guided them for centuries.

Stewardship, a core principle rooted in the Christian faith, refers to the responsible management and care of the resources entrusted to us by God [1]. In Catholic schools, stewardship encompasses the holistic development of students, the responsible use of resources, and the commitment to serve the common good. Stewardship is not only about caring for the environment and natural resources but also about nurturing human potential, promoting social justice, and contributing to the betterment of society. Catholic schools have a unique responsibility to instill a sense of stewardship in their students. By cultivating a spirit of stewardship, Catholic schools help students understand their role as caretakers of God's creation and active

agents of change in their communities. This commitment to stewardship strengthens the identity of Catholic schools, setting them apart from other educational institutions and allowing them to make a meaningful impact in the world.

This paper aims to explore the concept of stewardship as a defining characteristic of the identity of Catholic schools in the 21st century. This paper will discuss the challenges and opportunities ahead by examining the historical development of Catholic schools, the theological foundations of stewardship, and the role of stewardship in Catholic education. Additionally, it will delve into the practical implications of stewardship in curriculum and pedagogy and enhance stewardship initiatives in Catholic schools. Ultimately, this paper seeks to inspire Catholic educators and communities to embrace stewardship as an essential component of their mission and vision and to recommit themselves to the responsible stewardship of the resources and talents entrusted to them.

CORPUS

Challenges and opportunities for stewardship in the 21st century

Technological advancements

The rapid pace of technological advancements in the 21st century presents challenges and opportunities for stewardship in Catholic education [2].

Technology has enabled Catholic educators to create more engaging and interactive student learning experiences. Technology has also allowed Catholic education to reach a wider audience, including students worldwide. Online learning platforms and digital resources have made it easier for Catholic educators to share their knowledge and expertise with a global community [3].

However, the employment of technology in Catholic education also comes with some difficulties. Concerns exist about how technology will affect conventional teaching strategies and the teacher's contribution to the learning process. There are also worries about the possible drawbacks of technology. One example of a significant disadvantage is the potential for students to become overly dependent on electronic devices and gadgets for learning. It could lead to students needing help to engage in offline or non-digital learning experiences, potentially hindering their ability to learn effectively in different contexts.

In addition, excessive screen time and interaction with digital media limit opportunities for face-to-face interactions, which are crucial for developing interpersonal skills, empathy, and emotional intelligence. Lastly, using digital media for learning could expose students to content that may not align with the values and principles of Catholic education. It might be challenging to ensure that the digital resources used are in harmony with the moral and ethical teachings of the Catholic faith.

Cultural shifts

Cultural shifts, such as secularization, globalization, and increasing religious and cultural diversity, present challenges and opportunities for stewardship in Catholic education. As society becomes more secular, Catholic schools face the challenge of maintaining their distinctive Catholic identity and fostering a sense of spiritual and moral purpose in their students [4].

At the same time, the growing diversity within school communities offers opportunities for intercultural dialogue and collaboration, promoting a spirit of respect, tolerance, and solidarity. Catholic schools can leverage these opportunities to foster a deeper understanding of stewardship as a universal value that transcends cultural and religious boundaries and to encourage students to become global citizens who work

for the common good [5].

Environmental issues

The 21st century has seen a growing awareness of environmental issues, such as climate change, loss of biodiversity, and pollution [6]. These challenges underscore the urgency of ecological stewardship and the need for Catholic schools to educate and mobilize their students to address these pressing concerns. Catholic Schools face the challenge of incorporating environmental education into their curriculum while adhering to traditional academic subjects.

They also face the challenge of ensuring their environmental education aligns with Catholic social teaching. It means emphasizing environmental stewardship's importance while promoting social justice and economic equality [7].

However, addressing environmental concerns in a Catholic school offers chances to further Catholic social teaching, environmental stewardship, and social responsibility.

Financial sustainability

The financial sustainability of Catholic schools is another challenge and opportunity for stewardship in the 21st century [8]. Many Catholic schools face financial pressures due to declining enrollment, rising costs, and increased competition from other educational options.

Moreover, financial sustainability also involves ensuring that Catholic schools remain accessible and affordable to all families, regardless of their socioeconomic background [9].

Historical development of Catholic schools

Early beginnings

The roots of Catholic schools can be traced back to the early Christian era when the Church began to establish centers for learning and catechesis. The first Catholic schools primarily focused on young people's religious education and the formation of clergy [10]. Monastic schools emerged in the early Middle Ages and played a crucial role in preserving and transmitting knowledge during social and political turmoil [11]. They provided education in theology, philosophy, classical languages, and basic skills like reading, writing, and arithmetic.

In the later Middle Ages, cathedral schools and universities began to appear, expanding the scope of Catholic education to include liberal arts, sciences, and professional studies. These institutions played a vital role in shaping European intellectual and cultural life and contributed significantly to the development of Western civilization [12].

Evolution over time

Over time, Catholic schools continued to evolve, adapting to the changing needs of society and the Church. The Council of Trent (1545-1563) established seminaries to provide comprehensive and standardized education for priests, while religious orders such as the Jesuits, Dominicans, and Franciscans founded schools and colleges to educate the laity [13].

In the 19th and 20th centuries, Catholic schools expanded rapidly in response to societal changes and the Church's mission to evangelize and educate the growing populations in Europe, America, and other parts of the world. Catholic schools became essential to the educational landscape, providing access to quality

education for millions of children, especially in underserved communities [14].

The Second Vatican Council (1962-1965) reaffirmed the importance of Catholic education and called for a renewal of its mission and methods to respond to the challenges of the modern world. In the years that followed, Catholic schools began to emphasize the integration of faith and reason, social justice, intercultural dialogue, and the formation of students as responsible stewards of God's creation [15].

Influence of Catholic schools on society

Throughout history, Catholic schools have had a profound impact on society, both at the local and global levels. They have contributed to the intellectual, moral, and spiritual development of countless individuals, many of whom have become influential leaders in various fields, such as politics, science, education, and the arts [16].

Catholic schools have also significantly promoted social cohesion and intercultural understanding, especially in diverse and multicultural societies [17]. By fostering a spirit of respect, tolerance, and solidarity among their students, Catholic schools have helped build more inclusive and harmonious communities.

Moreover, Catholic schools have been at the forefront of efforts to address social inequalities and promote social justice. They have provided access to quality education for marginalized and disadvantaged populations, empowering them to break the cycle of poverty and build a better future for themselves and their families.

BIBLICAL FOUNDATIONS

The concept of stewardship is deeply rooted in the Bible, with numerous passages emphasizing the importance of responsible and compassionate management of the resources entrusted to us by God. In the book of Genesis, God creates humanity in His image and gives them dominion over the earth, charging them to "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth, and subdue it; and rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over every living thing that moves on the earth." (Genesis 1:28 – NASB1995) [18]. This passage highlights the role of human beings as caretakers of creation, responsible for ensuring their well-being and flourishing. Genesis teaches us that God created humanity to have dominion over the earth and to be responsible for its well-being. This text emphasizes that humans play a particular part in caring for God's creation and that we are responsible for using the opportunities and resources granted to us. [19]

In the parable of the Talents (Matthew 25:14-30), Jesus teaches the importance of using one's resources and gifts wisely and for the greater good. In this story, a master gives three of his servants access to his money; he gives one servant five talents, another two talents, and the third one talent, each in proportion to the servants' abilities. In this context, "talents" refers to a substantial sum of money.

While the third servant buried his talent in the ground, the first two servants invested and doubled the talents entrusted to them. When the master returned, he praised the first two servants for using their talents wisely and rewarded them, but he rebuked the third servant for his lack of faith and idleness and took away his talent.

This fable imparts several crucial stewardship teachings. It first underlines how essential it is to appropriately use our resources and gifts to further the greater good. The first two servants demonstrated how we should use our resources to add value and help others by investing in their abilities and being able to double their value. No one grew or gained anything due to the third servant's inaction.

The parable also tells us that God expects us to take ownership of the possibilities and resources He has provided us. How we use the resources and opportunities in life will be held accountable, as the master's response to the slaves' behavior demonstrates.

Third, the parable emphasizes that God has endowed us with particular talents and resources, and we are responsible for making the most significant use of them. The master divided the talents among the servants according to their abilities, showing that God has given every one of us a variety of resources and capacities, and we have to make the best use of them.

Another essential biblical concept related to stewardship is the principle of tithing or giving a portion of one's income to support the work of the Church and care for those in need. The custom of giving 10% of one's income to the Church originates in the Old Testament, which is stated in several texts, notably Deuteronomy 14:22–29. In this text, God gives the Israelites instructions on how to set aside a tenth of their annual harvest, herds, and flocks and bring it to the location He has chosen to call home. The Israelites are then told to spend the tithe on various things, such as feasting before the Lord, providing for the Levites (priests), and looking after the widows, orphans, and foreigners in their neighborhoods.

The act of tithing serves as a reminder that all we own is a gift from God and that we are required to use it for His and others' benefit. We thank God and our dedication to advancing His kingdom by contributing a portion of our money or resources to the Church and those in need.

Through tithing, we learn to believe in God's provision and capacity to satisfy our needs. We acknowledge that God is the source of all our blessings and that we depend on Him for our provision when we offer a portion of our money to Him.

Furthermore, although it is not written as directly as in the Old Testament, the New Testament also upholds the idea of tithing. Jesus chastises the Pharisees for their hypocrisy in Matthew 23:23, telling them that they should have demonstrated justice, mercy, and fidelity rather than ignoring the more critical aspects of the law, such as tithing.

MAGISTERIAL TEACHING OF BEC AND SYNODALITY

The Second Vatican Council (1962-1965) Throughout history, the Catholic Church has emphasized the importance of stewardship as a fundamental aspect of Christian discipleship. Various Church documents and teachings have elaborated on the biblical foundations of stewardship and guided how to live out this principle in daily life [20].

Pope Francis, in his encyclical *Laudato Si'*, called for an "integral ecology" that recognizes the interconnectedness of all creation and the responsibility of human beings to care for the earth and its resources [21]. He urged Christians to adopt a simpler and more sustainable lifestyle and to work towards the common good, emphasizing the importance of stewardship in addressing environmental degradation and social inequality.

The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) has also issued guidelines on stewardship, defining it as "a grateful response to God's grace and goodness." [22] The USCCB identifies four key principles of stewardship: (1) the recognition that everything we have is a gift from God, (2) the cultivation of responsible management of our resources, (3) the sharing of our gifts in justice and charity, and (4) the return of our gifts to God with an increase [23].

Hermeneutics

The magisterial teachings on stewardship provide a framework for living out the biblical principles of

responsible and compassionate management of the resources entrusted to us by God. They call on us to recognize the interconnectedness of all creation and work towards the common good, both for the flourishing of humanity and for the care of the earth and its resources.

The teachings of Pope Francis in *Laudato Si'* emphasize the relationship between stewardship and the environment even further, highlighting the necessity of a more equitable and sustainable approach to the use and maintenance of the earth's resources.

The importance of stewardship as a crucial component of Christian discipleship and a response to God's goodness and grace is emphasized in these magisterial teachings. They stress that stewardship entails accepting that all we own is a gift from God and handling these resources prudent and considerate. Sharing our blessings with others, especially those in need, is also emphasized as a crucial stewardship component. It necessitates a change in behavior and a dedication to advancing the common good, especially in tackling social challenges.

Technology has significantly changed Catholic education, opening up new possibilities for collaboration and learning and posing issues we must resolve. It is crucial for Catholic educators to assess how technology fits into the educational process carefully and to apply it in a way that is consistent with Catholic principles and values.

Catholic education can address these challenges by using a comprehensive strategy that incorporates technology, emphasizes Catholic social teaching, encourages environmental stewardship, implements sound financial management practices, promotes cultural competence, and fosters partnerships with the community. With this strategy, Catholic schools can remain relevant while giving students a thorough education that equips them with interaction with the outside world.

The Catholic Church also offers guidance on how Catholic education can address the challenges. The direction of the Church in Catholic education can play a significant role in addressing these challenges. By emphasizing Catholic social teaching, pastoral care, encouraging collaboration, professional development, and resources, the Church can support Catholic schools' mission to provide a comprehensive education that prepares students for engagement with the broader world.

Stewardship as a moral responsibility

Stewardship is a theological principle and a moral responsibility that flows from our identity as children of God, created in His image and likeness. As stewards of God's creation, we are called to care for the earth, use our resources wisely and generously, and work to improve society, especially the most vulnerable and marginalized.

In Catholic education, stewardship entails cultivating a sense of responsibility and compassion among students, helping them understand their role as caretakers of God's creation and agents of change in their communities. It also involves the responsible management of the resources entrusted to Catholic schools, ensuring their sustainability and continued ability to serve their mission of forming well-rounded, compassionate individuals.

As a grateful response to God's grace and goodness, the USCCB identifies fundamental principles that would lead the Church to answer the call of becoming a good steward:

The role of stewardship in Catholic education

The recognition that everything we have is a gift from God (Developing a sense of responsibility).

One of the primary goals of Catholic education is to cultivate a sense of responsibility among students. By

teaching stewardship principles, Catholic schools help students understand their role as caretakers of God's creation and active agents of change in their communities. Students learn the importance of using their gifts and resources wisely, caring for the environment, and contributing to the common good.

Incorporating stewardship into the curriculum and school culture encourages students to take responsibility for their actions and decisions individually and collectively. This sense of responsibility extends beyond the classroom to their families, local communities, and the broader society, fostering a lifelong commitment to stewardship and service.

Cultivating responsible management of our resources (Teaching care for God's creation).

Catholic education is vital in promoting environmental stewardship and teaching students the importance of caring for God's creation. By integrating environmental education into various subjects and providing hands-on learning opportunities, Catholic schools help students develop an appreciation for the natural world and a deeper understanding of our planet's ecological challenges.

Teaching care for God's creation also involves fostering a sense of wonder and gratitude for the beauty and complexity of the natural world. Through prayer, reflection, and the celebration of the liturgical seasons, students are encouraged to recognize God's presence in creation and respond with gratitude and reverence.

sharing our gifts in justice and charity (Promoting social justice).

Stewardship in Catholic education is not limited to environmental concerns but also includes a commitment to social justice. By promoting the principles of Catholic social teaching, such as the dignity of the human person, the preferential option for the poor, and the common good, Catholic schools empower students to become advocates for social justice and to work towards a more equitable and inclusive society.

Service-learning opportunities, social justice projects, and immersion experiences help students develop empathy, compassion, and a greater awareness of the needs of their local and global communities. As a result, they are better equipped to address systemic injustices, challenge discrimination, and promote the rights and dignity of all people.

The return of our gifts to God with increase. (Encouraging philanthropy)

Catholic education also plays a crucial role in cultivating a spirit of generosity and philanthropy among students. By teaching the importance of sharing their time, talent, and treasure with others, Catholic schools encourage students to become compassionate and generous individuals who are committed to the welfare of others.

Fundraising initiatives, volunteer opportunities, and charitable partnerships give students practical ways to put their faith into action and practice stewardship principles. These experiences help students develop a lifelong commitment to providing and a deep sense of gratitude for the blessings they have received.

CONCLUSION

Recap of key points

This paper has explored the concept of stewardship as a defining feature of the identity of Catholic schools in the 21st century. We have examined the historical development of Catholic schools, the theological foundations of stewardship, and its role in Catholic education. Furthermore, we discussed the challenges and opportunities for stewardship in the contemporary world.

Importance of stewardship in shaping the identity of Catholic schools in the 21st century

As society faces increasingly complex challenges related to social justice, environmental sustainability, and global interconnectedness, stewardship's importance in shaping Catholic schools' identity has never been more crucial. By embracing the principles of stewardship and integrating them into all aspects of their mission and educational programs, Catholic schools can effectively prepare students to become responsible, compassionate, and engaged citizens committed to making a positive difference in the world.

Assessing and enhancing stewardship in Catholic schools

To effectively assess and enhance stewardship in Catholic schools, it is essential first to identify clear, specific goals that reflect the school's mission and values. These goals may include:

1. Integrating stewardship principles across the curriculum and various subject areas.
2. Increasing student participation in service-learning and environmental initiatives.
3. Strengthening partnerships with parents, families, local parishes, and community organizations.
4. Enhancing the school's commitment to social justice and environmental sustainability.

By establishing clear stewardship goals, schools can create a shared vision and provide a framework for evaluating progress and identifying areas for improvement.

Evaluating progress

Regular evaluation of the school's stewardship efforts is crucial for ensuring that goals are being met and that the school positively impacts students and the broader community. Evaluation methods may include:

1. Surveys and feedback from students, parents, teachers, and community members to assess their perceptions of the school's stewardship efforts and the impact on student learning and engagement.
2. Data collection and analysis of student participation in service-learning projects, environmental initiatives, and social justice activities.
3. Documentation of professional development opportunities for teachers and staff related to stewardship education.
4. Tracking the school's environmental footprint, such as energy and water usage, waste management, and sustainable purchasing practices.

Continuous improvement strategies

Based on the evaluation process results, schools can identify areas for improvement and develop strategies for enhancing their stewardship efforts. These strategies may involve:

1. Providing additional professional development opportunities for teachers to deepen their understanding of stewardship principles and effective pedagogical approaches.
2. Revising the curriculum to integrate stewardship concepts and real-world applications more thoroughly.
3. Expanding partnerships with community organizations and other Catholic schools to increase opportunities for service-learning, collaboration, and shared learning.
4. Implementing new initiatives or practices to improve the school's environmental sustainability and commitment to social justice.

Sharing best practices

Sharing best practices and lessons learned with other Catholic schools and educational institutions can help

to promote a culture of stewardship and continuous improvement across the broader academic community. This sharing can be facilitated through the following:

1. Participating in conferences, workshops, and professional development programs focused on stewardship education.
2. Engaging in networking and collaboration opportunities with other Catholic schools locally and globally.
3. Publishing articles, case studies, or research findings in educational journals or online platforms.
4. Utilizing social media, websites, and newsletters to share the school's stewardship initiatives, successes, and challenges with the broader community.

Call to action for Catholic educators and communities.

Catholic educators and communities are called to actively participate in cultivating stewardship within their schools and to support the development of students who embody the values of responsibility, compassion, and justice. This involves:

1. Engaging in ongoing reflection and dialogue about the meaning and implications of stewardship in the 21st century.
2. Collaborating with other stakeholders, including parents, families, local parishes, and community organizations, to create a shared vision and commitment to stewardship.
3. Continuously assessing and enhancing stewardship efforts, sharing best practices, and learning from the experiences of other Catholic schools and educational institutions.
4. Encouraging and supporting students in their journey towards becoming responsible stewards of God's creation, empowering them to take on leadership roles in their communities and in addressing the challenges of our time.

By embracing the call to stewardship, Catholic schools can ensure that their identity and mission remain rooted in the Gospel values and the teachings of the Church while effectively preparing students to meet the challenges and seize the opportunities of the 21st century.

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