

WHAT DO YOU WANT FOR CHRISTMAS?

Culture of Want, Culture of Abundance

The practice of Christian stewardship is particularly appropriate throughout the season of Advent. During this time, marketing genius is at its best. We are bombarded with images that aim to persuade us to buy. The images tell us that our cars are not fast enough, our gadgets not fandangled enough, our vacations not exotic enough, and our clothes not stylish enough. They also suggest that we are often neither thin, nor buff, nor tanned, nor smart enough. Ultimately, it is easy to feel that not only do we not have enough but that we ourselves are inadequate. Welcome to our culture of want. By contrast, stewardship encourages us to recognise the gifts we have received from God and thereby cultivates a culture of abundance.

The Challenge

Back in September I began to wonder how it was that I have a closet full of clothes but nothing to wear. My usual response to this feeling has been to buy new clothes. The need to acquire more clothes, however, seems to resurface disproportionately often to the actual wearing-out of the clothes I already possess. What motivates me to shop? Clearly it is not a real lack of clothes. To get to the bottom of this mystery, I set myself a challenge: from the end of September until Christmas day, I promised not to buy any clothes, shoes, or accessories. Rather than an exercise in deprivation or punishment, this challenge is an invitation to self-awareness. Then, because these sorts of things are often better experienced in solidarity with others, I invited Carol, our resource librarian, to join me in the challenge. Carol enthusiastically took on the challenge but for her, the challenge would be with books bought and borrowed. Carol hoards books as much as I hoard clothes and doesn't read them through anymore than I wear out my clothes.

The Results

A full month into the challenge, much has come to light for both Carol and me.

1. We both quickly realised that clothes and books were not what we really long for. Our needs were deeper and much more personal.
2. Possessing actually inhibits us from using the items and thus getting what we truly want from them.
3. The discipline of the challenge has developed in us a sense of gratitude. Because of our want, we failed to recognise what we already have at our disposal.

Christian stewards know that everything they have and are belongs to God; we are only the caretakers and stewards of God's gifts. Since nothing belongs to us, everything is available to us and the secret is to enjoy without possessing. As we enter into the busiest shopping season of the year, I invite you to reflect on what you want for Christmas. And then on what you really want. Chances are, you already have it.