CULTIVATE GRATITUDE—ALL SUMMER LONG

“Here are many possibilities to be caretakers of God’s creation during summer. A starting point for such stewardship is the cultivation of gratitude. Here is a month-by-month approach that takes this aspect of stewardship to heart.

**MAY:** Although the summer solstice is still weeks away, for many May is an entrée into summer’s warmth and beauty. This month of Mary is often associated with flowers that are brought forth in May processions and given as signs of gratitude and affection on Mother’s Day. Make contact with the earth’s soil during this month. This can be as expansive as planting a garden or as simple as placing seeds in a flowerpot. Take joy in the feel of fresh soil and in the wonder of watching plants and flowers take root and grow. Use the *St. Francis Prayer Card* and pray “The Canticle of the Sun” as an expression of praise for the God of all creation.

**JUNE:** Summer brings an abundance of wildlife. Birds, bugs, squirrels, and rabbits fill the earth and sky with signs of life. Take time to notice the sights and sounds they bring and the variety of color and texture contained within their feathers and fur. Even annoying creatures can become sources of wonder when we consider their placement within the chain of life. Set out birdfeeders and explore humane ways of dealing with pests. Make it a point to expand your knowledge and understanding of local wildlife by visiting a nature center.

**JULY:** Temperatures can soar to high points at this time of year, resulting in drought-like conditions in some parts of the country. Whether we dwell in an arid or humid environment, all of us can foster a greater appreciation for water’s multiple uses. Savor a glass of cool water and consider how refreshing it is on a hot day. Conserve water by turning off the tap when you brush your teeth or wash up. Consider what a gift it is to...
“Stewardship implies that we must both care for creation according to standards that are not of our own making and at the same time be resourceful in finding ways to make the earth flourish.”

—Renewing the Earth

As a principal or school administrator, have you ever wondered, “How can we change the world—or at least, the world of our school environment?”

Here are ways to respond to that question and create a Catholic school environment that seeks to change the world.

START WITH YOUR TEACHING AND ADMINISTRATIVE STAFF.

• Give each of them a copy of Stewardship and Young Adults or To Be a Christian Steward. Ask them to read it over the summer, discuss it during departmental meetings, or use it as the basis for the first staff meeting in August.

• Schedule a portion of your last or first staff meeting as a brainstorming session on goals for the upcoming school year. Focus on the question, “What is Catholic Stewardship?” and use the responses provided in Stewardship and Young Adults as guides for the session.

• Encourage department chairs/heads and key administrators to practice their mentoring skills by reflecting on question four in Stewardship and Young Adults.

ENGAGE YOUR PARENT-TEACHER ORGANIZATION.

• Ask the leadership of your PTO or PTA to distribute a copy of Stewardship and Young Adults or To Be a Christian Steward to each parent. Use this as an opportunity to share with parents that stewardship is a goal for the school—

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• View the video Hope for a Renewed Earth with the school board and/or faculty. Discuss ways to incorporate stewardship of the environment into the curriculum for next year in a more intentional way.
• Hand out St. Francis Prayer Cards as a gift to all teachers and staff. Pray together at an end-of-the-year party or event.
• Review the list of resources in Sharing Catholic Social Teaching and order materials to improve a faculty library or resource corner.
• Set aside a date for a teacher retreat in August. Plan to use the retreat outline in Stewards of God’s Gifts—Prayer Services and Retreats for the Catechetical Year. Explore ways to connect the school faculty with the parish celebration of Catechetical Sunday (September 19).
• Run off the resource articles from Renewing the Face of the Earth: A Resource for Parishes and distribute them to faculty and school board members. Encourage them to read the articles over the summer.
• Distribute copies of To Be a Christian Steward to the parents at an end-of-the-year event. Encourage wise stewardship over the summer.
• Initiate a discussion with the school board about ways to make the school facilities more environmentally friendly. For example, how can you increase recycling efforts or reduce the waste of water, food, or electricity?
• Enlist the help of parents in planting an appreciation garden on the school grounds. Add a flower or plant for each teacher and staff member.
• Distribute copies of Stewardship and Young Adults to young parents at a PTO meeting. Use the questions as a starting point for discussion on how the school and parents can work together more to be better stewards of the school’s resources.

“The aesthetic value of creation cannot be overlooked. Our very contact with nature has a deep restorative power; contemplation of its magnificence imparts peace and serenity. The Bible speaks again and again of the goodness and beauty of creation, which is called to glorify God.”

—John Paul II, 1990 World Day of Peace message
FIVE WAYS TO PROMOTE STEWARDSHIP OF THE EARTH

- Review the “Did you know?” questions on pp. 41-42 of *Renewing the Face of the Earth*. Choose four or five to share with your students.
- Talk about possible causes of environmental injustice and brainstorm ways that students can be good stewards of the earth.
- Help students identify ways they can practice the three R’s of environmental stewardship: Reduce, Reuse, and Recycle. Incorporate these into your classroom procedures and rules.
- Utilize prayers and prayer services that praise God for the wonder of creation. Send ideas for such prayer home and encourage parents to use them as part of family prayer. Use the booklet *Prayer Services and Retreats for the Catechetical Year* which focuses on the theme “Stewards of God’s Gifts” as a source of examples.
- Explain that a central theme of Catholic social teaching is caring for the dignity of each person. Ask students to name ways they can care for others over the summer months.

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have clean, fresh water available whenever we need it. Not all areas of the world are as fortunate. Check out the work of Catholic Relief Services (www.catholicrelief.org) to help those in developing countries find and maintain clean water.

AUGUST: In the United States, we can view just about every kind of landscape—jagged mountain ranges, vast prairies, sandy beaches, rocky canyons, desert expanses, and lush rainforests. When traveling to another part of the country or world this summer, notice the landscape and the variety it contains. And don’t neglect the beauty that lies close to home.

For more reflections on a year-round approach to gratitude for God’s creation, see the “Homily Hints” in *Peace with God the Creator, Peace with All Creation.*

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- Encourage parents to take home copies of the Family Commitment Prayer Card, which is one of the resources featuring the annual catechetical theme, “Stewards of God’s Gifts.” Invite families to pray using the card throughout the year that they might be good stewards of God’s gifts.