

SYNOD THEME: “Christian Stewardship”, 1 Cor. 4:1 & 2.

Our Synod Theme “Christian Stewardship” is a follow up of 2017 theme which is “Christian Fellowship”. In 2017 Bishop’s Charge, we defined the word Christian looking at the time and place of its origin, author of the name, the spread of the name and the historical significance of the name which I like to reproduce here for the purpose of emphasis.

The historical significance of the name – (1) It marked the distinct emergence of Christianity from Judaism, and the recognition of its right to a separate place among the religions of the world. Hitherto, to outsiders, Christianity had been only a Jewish sect (cf. the words of Gallio, Acts 18:14, 15), nor had the first Apostles themselves dreamt of breaking away from synagogue and Temple. But the Antiochenes saw that Christ’s disciples must be distinguished from the Jews and put into a category of their own. They understood, however dimly, that a new religion had sprung up on the earth, and by giving its followers this new name, they helped to quicken in the mind of the Church itself the consciousness of a separate existence. (2) It marked the fact, not heretofore realized, that Christianity was a religion for the Gentiles. Probably, it was because the missionaries to Antioch not only preached Christ, but preached Him ‘unto the Greeks also’ (Acts 11:20), that the inhabitants discerned in these men the heralds of a new faith. It was not the way of Jewish Rabbis to proffer Judaism to Greeks in the market-place. Christianity appeared in Antioch as a universal religion, making no distinction between Jew and Gentile. (3) It is not without significance that it was first in Antioch that the Christians received this name. It shows how the Church’s centre of gravity was shifting. Up to this time, Christians as well as Jews looked to Jerusalem in everything as the mother of them all. But Jerusalem was not fitted to be the chief city of a universal faith. Paul saw this clearly – helped to it without doubt by his experiences at this very time. And so Antioch became the headquarters of aggressive Christianity in the early Apostolic age (13:1ff, 14:26f, 15:1ff, 22ff, 35ff, 18:22ff). It served as a stepping-stone for that movement, inevitable from the day when Christianity was first preached unto the Gentiles, which by and by made Rome, the metropolis of the world and mother-city also of the universal Church. (4) The name marked the fact that Christianity was not the religion of a book or a dogma, an idea or an institution, but a faith that centred in a Person. The men of Antioch were mistaken when they supposed that Christ was a personal name, but they made no mistake in thinking that He whose name they took to be

Christos was the foundation-stone of this new faith. By calling the disciples Christians they became unconscious prophets of the truth that Christianity, whether regarded from the side of historical revelation or of personal experience, is all summed up in the Person of Jesus Christ.

Hence, a Christian is supposed to be referred to as little Christ. A Christian from our perspective is a person who has lost his/her personal identity to take the new nature found in Christ. Paul the Apostle understood this fact and said;

I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me; and the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me. (**Gal.2:20**), and

But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ. Indeed I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as refuse, in order that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own, based on law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith; that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death. (**Phil.3:7 – 10**).

Stewardship:

The word stewardship has its root in the word steward. The Advanced Learner's Dictionary of current English defines the word steward as (1) a man who arranges for the supply of food. (2) servants who attends to the needs of passengers in a ship or airliner (3) a man who is responsible for organizing details of a dance, race, meeting, or public meeting, and (4) a man who manages another's property especially a large house or estate.

The term steward is found six times in Authorized Version of Old Testament. It is applied Eliezer in Genesis 15:2 where Revised Version rightly puts it thus "he that shall be possessor of my house". In Genesis 43:19, 44:1 – 4, we see Joseph as steward in the house of Potipha. He is referred to as "he who was over his house". Other references are Genesis 43:16, 1 Kings 16:9 in Revised Version. We also found the word in 1 Chronicles 28:1, Daniel 1:11 & 16.

In the New Testament, we have the terms steward in Matt.20:3, Luke 8:3, and Gal. 4:3. The Greek word *aikonomos* and stewardship is *aikonomia* stewardship is used in Luke 16 16:2, 3 – 4, and metaphorically in 1 Cor. 9:17, Eph. 3:2, Col. 1:25 and 1 Tim. 1:4. A steward is therefore somebody who is in charge of properties which are not his/her own.

We shall look at stewardship in three categories i.e. (1) Stewardship of Talents, (2) Stewardship of Time and (3) Stewardship of Treasures:

Stewardship of Talents:

Talent is the natural power in a person to do something well. It is the ability discovered in a person which distinguished the person from others. For instance, a person may be referred to be of great talent in the area of his career.

The above reveals that everyone has the ability to perform very well in certain area of human endeavours. We acknowledge the fact that whatever talents a man or woman has was endowed to him/her from above. In John 3:27, John replied “A man can receive only what is given him from heaven”.

In 1 Corinthians 4:7, Paul said “For who makes you different from anyone else? What do you have that you did not receive? And if you did receive it, why do you boast as though you did not? The two quotations point to the fact that our talents are special endowment from God.

In the church, God has given so many talents. Hence, Paul said in 1 Corinthians 12 verse 27 and 28 “Now you are the body of Christ and each one of you is part of it. And in the church, God has appointed first Apostles, second, Prophets, third Teachers, then workers of miracles, also those having gifts of healing, those able to help others, those with gifts of administration, and those speaking in different kinds of tongues.” What is important to Paul and which he wants all Christians to understand is the fact that one gift is not superior to another. All we must do is to ensure that each one of us discovers how we can serve Christ’s body with the gifts God has given us. Your spiritual gifts are not for your own self advancement. They were given to us for serving God and enhancing the spiritual growth of the body of believers.

In the church today, we have the Bishops, Bishop’s wives, Priests, wardens, vergers, layreaders, choirs, organists, choirmaster, sexton, women organizations head by the Bishop’s wife, Priests’ wives,

chaplains and other members of congregation with chosen careers in all spheres of lives. The various talents which individual member has is to be used for the spiritual growth of the body of believers. Our chosen professions and vocations are God's endowments and they are disposed to us in order for us to accept responsibility in using them for the good of others.

Stewardship of Time:

Time is defined as (a) all the days of the past, present and future (b) the passing of all the days, months, and years, taken as a whole (c) (with indefinite article and adjective). Portion or measure of time i.e. Six O'clock is a point of time. Six hours is a period of time, etc. God has been generous to the extent of giving every person 24 hours a day. Every person, male, female, old and young, rich and poor.

As stewards of time, we are expected to be faithful in the way we spend the time. All Christians, Clergy and lay people must be managers of time. Time an adage says is money and time is not a friend of any person. There is nothing like African time. Hence, time management must be adopted in order to use our time faithfully.

Time management is the process of reaching set objectives by effectively and efficiently using the least amount of time. In church administration, time management includes making judgments regarding priorities, planning, scheduling and delegating of responsibilities to appropriate useful persons with overview supervision by the head.

Time management is all embracing; it makes or mar the administrator. The time spent in services can either encourage or discourage the people. Often time, parishioners have changed their places of worship due to poor time management.

A good time manager will enable the Church to utilize all her resources and personnel in fulfillment of the mission of making people know the love of God for humanity. God is the Chief Manager of time; He set out an order when He created the world – Gen. 1 – 2:3. When leaders are God-centered and people-oriented, efforts will achieve maximum result at little or no distant time. An

administrator of the Church must understand the importance of interpersonal relationship as a veritable tool of communicating the gospel of Christ to both his superior and subordinates.

The above analogy will prepare the people and environment for a productive purpose in the heavenly agenda as spelt out in Colossians 1:9 – 12.

It should be categorically stated that a good time manager will only be truly successful in fulfilling the mission of the Church by knowing and having a personal experience of conversion into Christ and striving to live in His love and grace, else he can be successful in all physical structures and fail in spiritual things.

Leaders must learn to understand that people are more important than structures and programmes. This was what Rehoboam failed to understand in his answer that led to the automatic breakdown of his kingdom 1 Kg.12:11-19. As leaders, we must be ready and willing to accept responsibility for directing the ministry of the local church. This includes early development of lay leaders to share responsibility, a clearly defined agenda and timely communication of ideas.

It is also essential to state that time management includes proper delegation of responsibility to others who will work with set goals to deliver. This is why making of decisions must not be over delayed, though, we must not rush into conclusions when we are not convinced over certain issues. Early consultation will always save leaders from embarrassment.

A Christian must have his specific goals with time tags to deliver. Christ said, "I will do the work of him who sent me while it is day, for the night is coming when no one can work – Jn.9:4. A constant re-evaluation is necessary. This will help us to bring unity and harmony to the myriad of activities that takes place in our local Church and jurisdiction.

First, the leaders of the Church must recognize the needs of the Church, plan ahead, set out methodology, stimulate and implement within a time frame, else procrastination will devour his beautiful ideas. A late response of a Church leader can make parishioners feel disconnected and even drop out of the Church. This calls for a follow-up procedure for members.

The above dream requires a paradigm shift in the life of a Church leader. How can an Anglican priest achieve his dreamed ministry with the bureaucracy of administrative bottle neck? He must (“**plan the work, and work the plan**”). It is very essential that we prioritize our activities with time to execute the same. Every Christian needs a good time management system in order to keep up with appointments and other responsibilities of life.

We waste a lot of time as Christian without focus or goal of achievable dreams. We need to ask ourselves some questions as we spend our day. What are the essentials that we must do in a particular day and time? Our schedule seems over clustered with too many things.

Is this really important? What is my priority here? This will help us to make sound judgment, communicate effectively, care compassionately, discover quick solutions, think strategically, use time wisely and maintain credibility in the place God has assigned us to serve – 2 Tim.3:14 – 17.

To effectively manage our time, we must avoid procrastination. Prov.20:4 says “A sluggard does not plow in season; so at harvest time he looks but finds nothing”. When you fail to work, there will be no harvest, and you see the harvest of others, frustration sets in. Next, avoid indecision: Take a decision and act, failure is a ladder to favour. It gives room for learning and opportunity for adjustment.

Let us learn to do without excuse, delegate without hesitation, keep date and file on items currently being worked on. Discard without sentiment those items that have little or no value.

SUGGESTIONS:

- (a) Start each day by reviewing your appointments, schedules of tasks, list of to-do, etc; after the morning devotion.
- (b) Prioritize your to-do list into two categories of A and B. Move any important item left undone the previous day into the day's activities.
- (c) Allocate time to activities and do not leave REST out of the schedule as our failure to allocate time to it can allocate you to a permanent rest.

- (d) Eliminate mind clutter by writing down the task for each day as soon as you decide on it.
- (e) Learn to break the urgency habit. Not every problem or task has to be resolved immediately.
- (f) Set apart the earliest part of the day for the most important assignment or function.
- (g) Limit time spent in counseling, unless is your counseling day. Learn to put off your cell phones when doing important task that demands privacy and accuracy.

Stewardship of Treasures:

Treasures are the good things of life, like gold and silver, jewels and wealth. It is highly valued object. In our 21st century, understanding of treasures has to do with money and what we buy with money, all these amount to wealth. We may say all that we acquire in lives journey, like houses, vehicles and other amenities are our treasures. In Matthew's Gospel chapter 6:19 – 21, we have this quotation from our Lord Jesus Christ "Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven where moth and rust do not destroy and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also". Treasures are earthly thing which we value. However, we must recognize that the endowments came from God. Deuteronomy 8:18 reads, "But remember the Lord your God, for it is he who gives you the ability to produce wealth, and so confirms his covenant, which he swore to your forefathers as it is today".

We live in an age that measures people's worth by how much money they make. Many people today consider wealth to be a sign of God's approval. Though prosperity may earn people's praise, it must never substitute for devotion and service to God. We are to make wise use of the financial opportunities we have, not to earn heaven, but so that heaven (eternal dwellings') will be a welcome experience for those we help. If we use our money to help those in need or to help others find Christ our earthly investment will bring eternal benefit. When we obey God's will, the unselfish use of possessions will follow.

God calls us to be honest, even in small details we could easily rationalize away. Heaven's riches are far more valuable than earthly wealth. But if we are not trustworthy with our money here (no matter how much or little we have), we will be unfit to handle the vast riches of God's kingdom. Money has the power to take God's place in our life. It can become our master. How can you tell if you are a slave to money?

- (a) Do you think and worry about money frequently?
- (b) Do you give up doing what you should do or would like to do in order to make money?
- (c) Do you spend a great deal of your time caring for your possessions?
- (d) Is it hard for you to give money away?
- (d) Are you in debt?

Money is a hard master and a deceptive one. Wealth promises power and control, but often it cannot deliver. Great fortunes can be made – and lost – overnight and no amount of money can provide health, happiness or eternal life. How much better it is to let God be your master? God's servants have peace of mind and security, both now and forever.

Every Christian is God's treasurer. Our use of money is a good test of the Lordship of Christ, therefore:

- (1) Let us use our resources wisely because they belong to God and not to us.
- (2) Money can be used for good or evil; let us use ours for good.
- (3) Money has a lot of power, so we must use it carefully and thoughtfully.
- (4) We must use our material goods in a way that will foster faith and obedience (Luke 12:33 & 34).

In 1 Corinthians 4:1 & 2, Paul urged the Corinthians to think of him, Peter (Cephas) and Apollos not as leaders of factions but as servants of Christ entrusted with the secret things of God. A servant does what his master tells him to do. As servants and stewards, we must do what God tells us to do in the Bible and through His Holy Spirit. Each day God presents us with needs and opportunities that challenge us to do what we know is right.

In the parable of the talents each of the servants who traded with the Master's money and profited were praised with the same words "Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your Master's happiness" (Matthew 25:21 & 23). Here the emphasis is faithfulness in our services.

In the parable, the Master divided the money (talents) among his servants according to their abilities. No one received more or less than he could handle. If he failed in his assignment, his excuse could not be that he was overwhelmed. Failure could come only from Laziness or hatred toward the Master. The talents represent any kind of resources we are given. God gives us time, talents and treasures according to our abilities, and He expects us to invest them wisely until His returns. We

are responsible to use well what God has given us. The issue is not how much we have but how well we use what we have. We must use our time, talents and treasures diligently in order to serve God completely.

Let me conclude with what Apostle Peter said in 1 Peter 4:7 – 11:

The end of all things is at hand; therefore keep sane and sober for your prayers.

Above all hold unfailing your love for one another, since love covers a multitude of sins. Practise hospitality ungrudgingly to one another. As each has received a gift, employ it for one another, as good stewards of God's varied grace: whoever speaks, as one who utters oracles of God; whoever render service, as one who renders it by the strength which God supplies; in order that in everything God may be glorified through Jesus Christ. To him belong glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen.

Your Bishop & Friend,
+ Olubayo Ilesa.