

The 12 Gardens of Stewardship

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Planting the Seeds of Stewardship: Prayer

Any gardener hoping for a good harvest has first to prepare the soil and plant the seeds. One significant way of planting the seeds of stewardship is through prayer. Our prayers, especially prayers of thanksgiving, can help us to recognize God as the source of all we have, of all our gifts. Here are some ways to plant the garden of stewardship:

Thank God for those who support you (emotionally, financially, etc.).

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At your meal prayer, give thanks for those who did all the work before the meal got to your table.

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Every time you take a shower, thank God for that blessing.

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Every time you are in a hurry, and make it through a green light, thank God for that blessing.

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Put a photo of your family on your dashboard in your car and remember to thank God for them as you are stopped in traffic.

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Thank those whose work usually goes unnoticed: those who clean your business office, those who serve the food in fast-food restaurants, cashiers at the supermarket, etc.

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Say prayers for your pastor, parish staff, and all those who volunteer their time in parish leadership.

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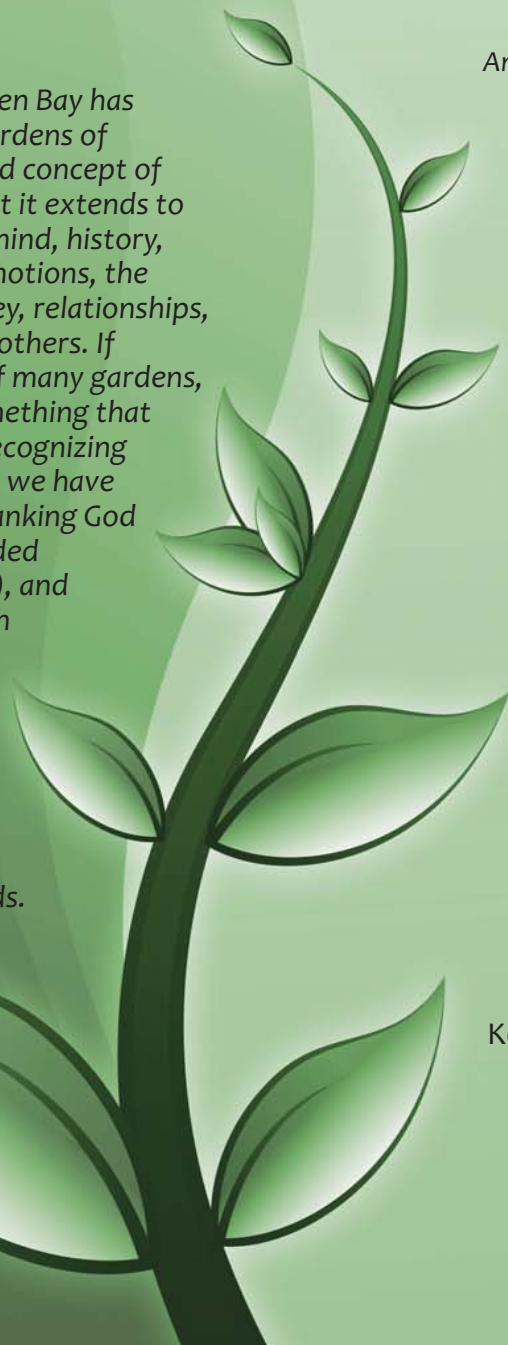
Keep a calendar or screen saver of pictures of beautiful sights, and remember to give thanks to God for how beautiful and wonderful creation is!

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Write (and send) a thank you note to someone who has helped to form you in the faith.

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When you walk in your front door, give thanks for having a place to live.



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The Garden of the Body

Taking care of ourselves – getting proper nutrition, exercise, rest, etc. – is a crucial aspect of stewardship. For if we don't take proper care of ourselves, how can we possibly perform any other aspect of stewardship?

Take good care of yourself. Get a flu shot.
Take the medicine you should.

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Go for a walk. It will help you to better appreciate our world, and will make you healthier.

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Drive carefully. Don't tailgate. Use your turn signal every time.

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Get enough sleep – it has a positive effect on the rest of your entire life.

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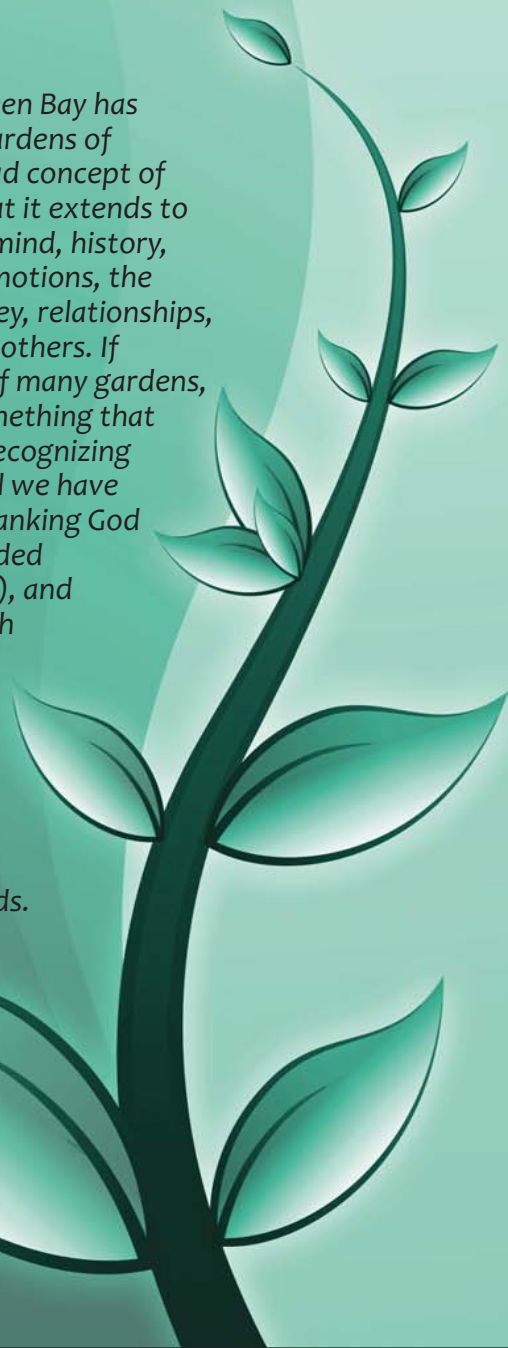
See a doctor and dentist as regularly as you are supposed to.

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If you are able, park your car in the furthest spot away in the parking lot. The exercise is good for you, and you'll leave a space up close for those in a hurry and others who need to be home.

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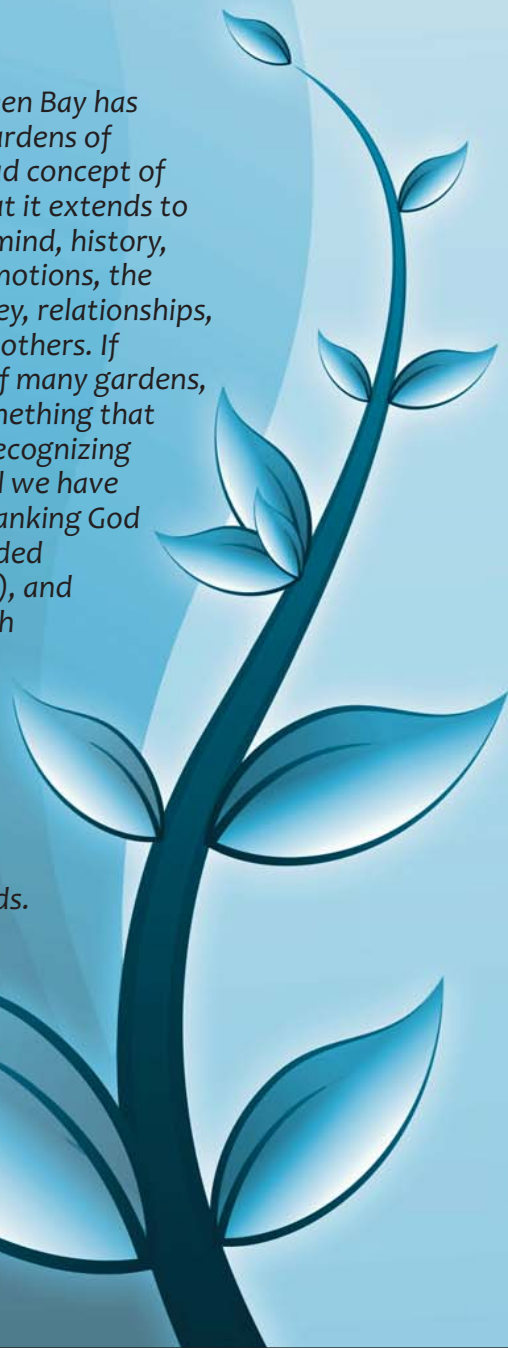
Wash your hands. Not spreading germs or disease is really good stewardship!



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The Garden of Good Decisions

Not only does God want us to make the decision to be a good steward, but being a good steward involves making the most informed, well-considered decisions possible. Working together and trying to arrive at some sort of consensus – or at least a common understanding – is an act of good stewardship when we are making decisions with others.

Get a family disaster plan together – who'll call who, where you'll meet, how you'll get out.

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Ask the Lord for guidance in making decisions, especially to be a good steward in your decisions.

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Make decisions keeping the vision and mission of Jesus in mind.

WWJD?

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The Garden of Emotions

Good stewards are called to balance and develop their emotional lives.

Post a favorite comic strip on your bathroom mirror – starting off the day and ending the day in good humor is good stewardship of your emotions.

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Express your feelings appropriately – don't hold them in. Use 'I feel' statements. Your loved ones deserve to know what you are thinking, rather than your keeping it bottled up inside.

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Of course get enough rest, eat a balanced diet, exercise and avoid caffeine/alcohol/tobacco/drugs.

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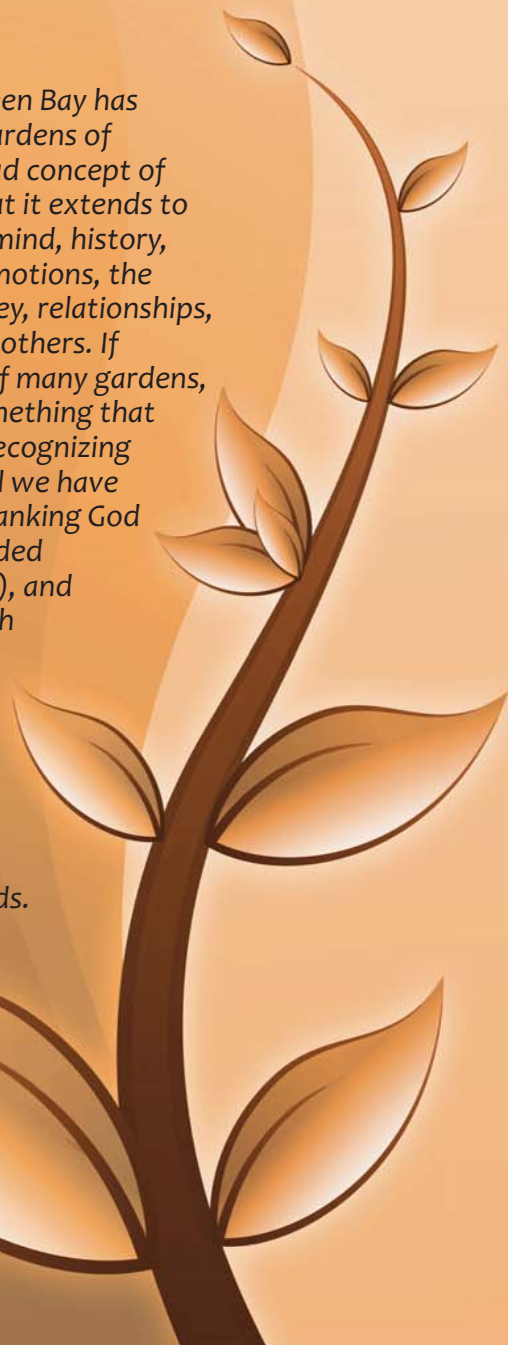
Find a way to encounter positive thoughts and ideas each day. Use famous quotations perhaps, or a 'thought-a-day' calendar.

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Prioritize your challenges – make a list and start tackling the easy ones first, but keep working on that list (including adding new challenges).

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Make a list of what is troubling you and put it away until you have time to deal with it.



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The Garden of the Globe

If there is one other way (besides money) that people think of stewardship, it is almost certainly being stewards of the earth, the earth that God gave us. Archbishop Thomas Murphy reminds us how God gave us humans dominion over creation. But dominion requires responsibility too. While we are called to build up the world through noble human effort, we are also called to treat our environment responsibly and with care.

Instead of discarding your lawn clippings, 'grass-cycle'; don't cut it as short and leave the clippings lying on the lawn.

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Go to a local astronomy night, and increase your appreciation for the vastness of the universe God created. (Such gatherings are usually publicized in your local paper).

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Take a walk, go to the park, fly a kite. Staying connected with the outdoors is good for everyone.

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On a clear night, go outside and look at the moon and stars and marvel at the vastness of God's universe.

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Save electricity to the greatest extent possible – turn off those unused lights, TV, radio, computer – the less power we use, the less impact we have on the environment.

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Save water to the greatest extent possible – don't leave the water running, over-water your yard, etc. The less water we use, the less impact we have on the environment.

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Next time you are at a fast food restaurant, don't take any more napkins, straws, etc., than you'll actually use.

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Be diligent about your recycling. Recycle the simple stuff like newspapers, bottles and cans, and also the more difficult stuff (like computers, furniture, etc.) that clogs our landfills.

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The Garden of History

In our culture we are very focused on the future. In this current era, we tend to think that our era is the culmination of all previous eras and so everything now is superior to what came before.

Being aware of our history helps us as good stewards to continue to value the things from the past, as well as to keep the lessons of the past fresh in our minds.

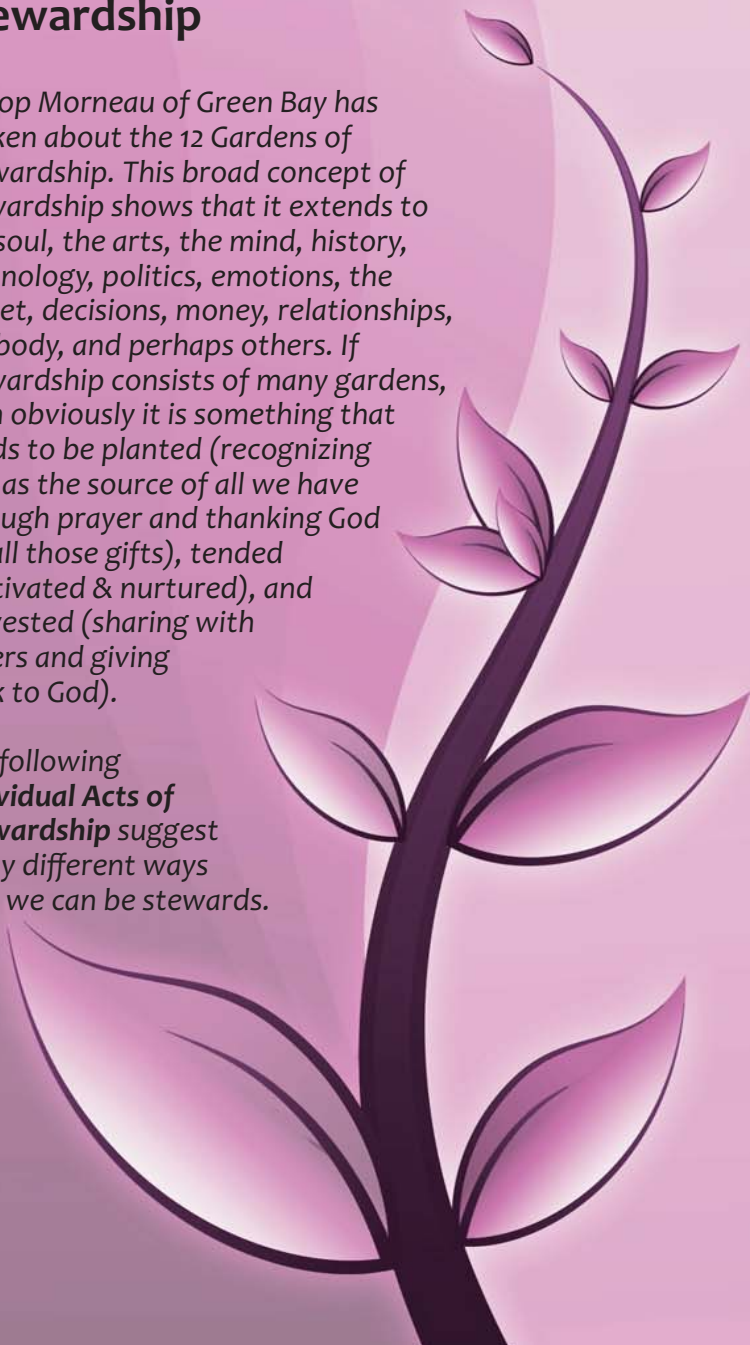
Go through all those photos you have lying around and haven't labeled. Pick out the 12 or 20 most important photos and do write basic information on those (who, event, date, where). Your family will be grateful that you did.

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Visit your local historical/heritage museum. You'll learn something about your community's past that you didn't know before.

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On your next vacation, don't overlook or neglect the historical sites you travel by. Knowing our history is an important part of being a good steward.



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The Garden of the Mind

A mind is a terrible thing to waste. We've all heard that phrase many times. And it is true. God wants us, as good stewards, to put good things in our minds. Unfortunately, the world, often via the media, presents us with so many bad things to put in our minds. We also need to keep our minds nimble and clear, always keep learning and remain curious.

Find some free or very inexpensive entertainment. Simple things like a ferry boat ride, watching buildings under construction, going to the park, etc., can be fascinating, especially if you have children.

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Only go to movies or read books that are good for you and avoid the ones you know you should.

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Support the arts in your community by visiting your local art museum or attending a performance of one of your performing arts groups.

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'Bookmark' the Vatican website (www.vatican.va), the USCCB website (usccb.org), and your local diocesan and parish websites and visit them occasionally. The sites have a lot of fascinating and frequently new material.

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Learn more about what the Church teaches about moral issues. You can find this information easily at usccb.org or your local diocesan website.

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Discourage the use of inappropriate language.



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The Garden of Money

Money seems to bring out two responses in many who think about stewardship: it is all about money, or they ignore stewardship of money. And of course it is neither. Stewardship is about a lot more than money, but money is an important part of stewardship. Since money is a medium of exchange – and for many of us the paycheck we exchange our time in return for – how we use our money is very representative of our stewardship.

To paraphrase many people: show me your checkbook and I'll tell you a lot about your stewardship.

Do a budget – we aren't being good stewards unless we look at how we use all our money.

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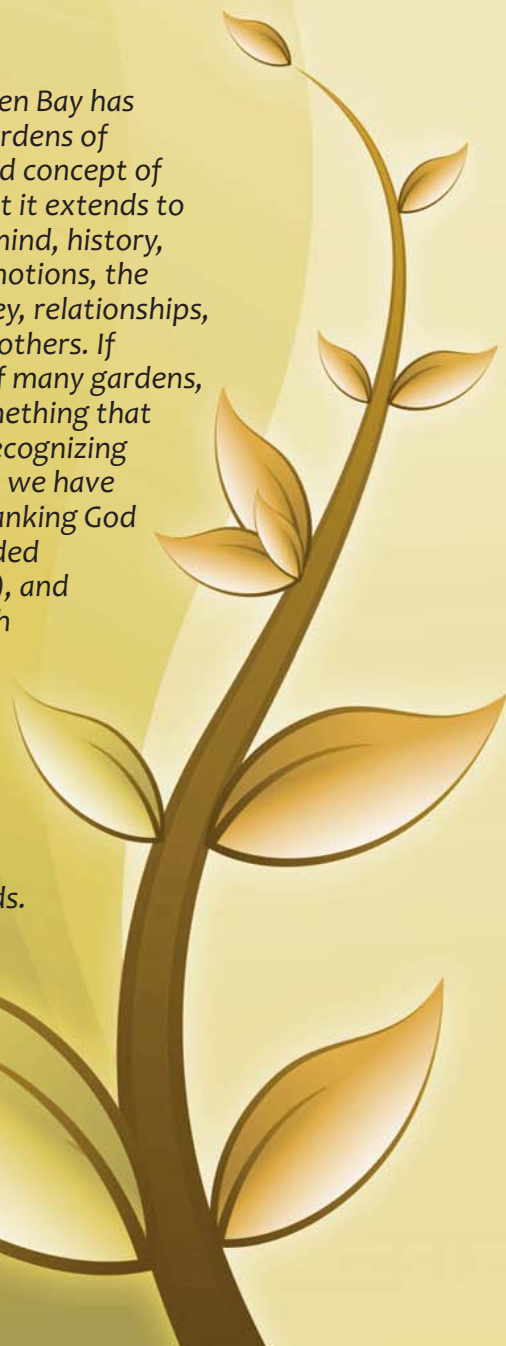
Put a sticky note on your credit card about the importance of being a good steward. For example, "Am I being a good steward by purchasing this?"

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Most Americans think no matter how much they earn that if they just earned \$10,000 more, they would have enough. So, really, how much is enough?

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Set a limit in advance on how much you'll spend on birthday gifts, Christmas gifts, etc.



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The Garden of the 'Polis' (Community)

A good steward is a good member of the community. To be good community members we need to be both informed and involved.

Read a newspaper every day.

Being well informed is part of being a good steward.

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Be a steward of your neighborhood – attend a community meeting.

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Write a letter to the editor about something you care deeply about.

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Read your voter's guide and check out the candidates' websites before you vote.

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Start or participate in your neighborhood block watch.



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The Garden of Possessions/Technology

We live in a very materialistic culture. Our spending to acquire more can often be put to better use in helping the poor and needy. Our quest to acquire and hang on to so many possessions can also draw us away from finding and staying close to God.

Make a list of the things you would like to buy.
What are needs and what are wants?

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Keep your car running well. Maintain it on a regular schedule.

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Don't buy for fashion. Buy for practicality.

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Go through a closet or garage and get rid of anything you haven't used in the past year, and give what is appropriate to a second hand store.

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Next time you purchase a large item, seek some guidance from a consumer ratings magazine first.

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Plan your purchase of big ticket items as far ahead as possible – that way you'll have time to find the best deal and the best product.

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Next time you need a special piece of equipment or tool, rent it from a rental company first – unless you are absolutely sure you'll use it enough to justify the purchase. Studies show that people massively overestimate how much they need or will use many purchases.

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The Garden of Relationships

Our lives are busy, but the purpose of our lives is all about relationships – with God and with each other. To neglect our relationships, especially with those who are close to us, is to not exercise good stewardship. Our relationships can be a lot of work, but they are crucial for our survival. We must give our relationships proper time and attention – just like a gardener gives proper time and attention to his or her garden.

Send a card to someone in need of support.

When you hear a siren, say a prayer for those it is going to aid, and a prayer of thanksgiving for those who help them.

Invite some friends over that you haven't gotten together with in a while.

Write a letter to someone you've not spoken to or written to in awhile.

Eat out one less time a week, Invite a friend over for dinner.

Take a parenting class or anger management class. They are great for learning better communication skills, even if you don't think they'd apply to you.

Sign up for a Marriage Encounter weekend. It's great stewardship of your marriage.

Take every chance you get to say hello to your neighbors. You'll build good relationships that will benefit you, too.

Attend your family gatherings if at all possible – maintaining a relationship with those who share a common history and background can help us understand more about our past and our future.

Visit the homebound – especially any relatives, friends or acquaintances.

Say a prayer for those in need every day.

Don't be shy – when appropriate, wave or say hello.

Tell someone that they are gifted – compliment them on their talents.

Don't pass on gossip or participate when people are gossiping.

If there is someone you know who might benefit from a timely word or gentle suggestion, make a point to speak to them.

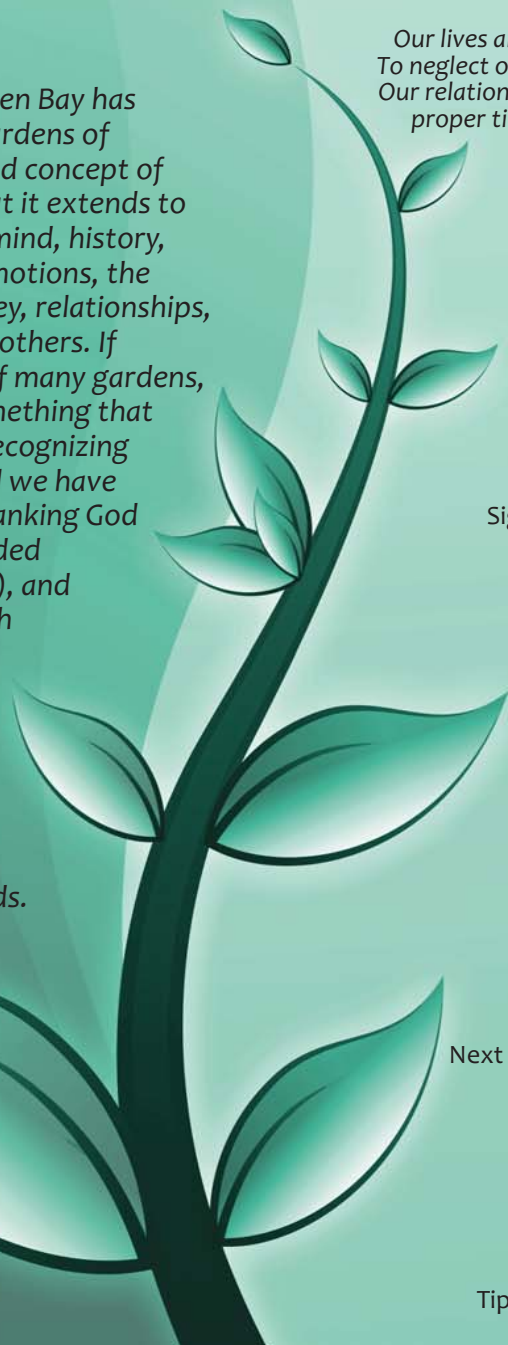
Next time you get an invitation with an RSVP, respond, one way or the other, immediately. You'll be a good steward of everyone's time.

Be careful getting in and out of your car to not ding another's car. Treating other people's property with respect is good stewardship.

Be honest – pay what you owe.

Give others the gift of silence.

Tip those who serve you properly – including hotel maids and other service providers.



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The Garden of the Spirituality

The garden of our soul is where God cultivates us! If we don't allow God to cultivate us, our efforts at planting, cultivating, and harvesting will be like gardens with little light, rain, or other essentials needed for vigorous growth.

Attend adult religious education whenever possible.
Good stewards continually learn more about God and their faith.

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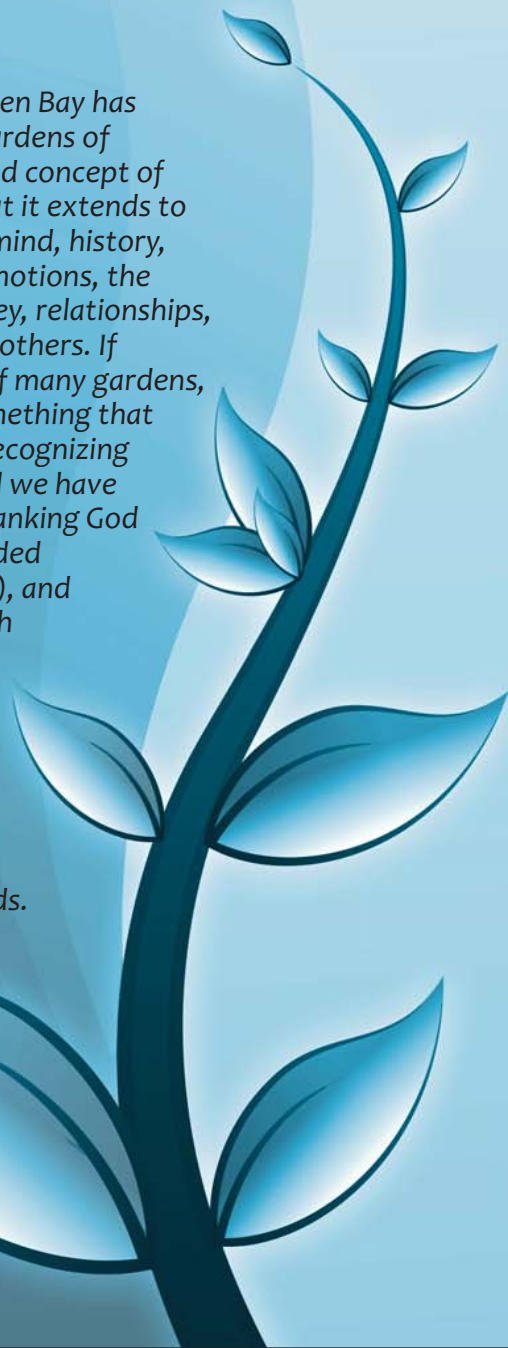
Read the readings for Sunday sometime before you go to Mass each week and at least once after Sunday. Good stewards recognize Sunday as the "source" of their week. You can find the readings at www.usccb.org.

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Make some time in your schedule to regularly participate in a parish or neighborhood-based faith sharing group.

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Take off your watch when entering church for Mass to symbolize that this is God's time.



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The Garden of Time

Time, other than our faith, is probably the most valuable gift of all that God has given us. It is the one gift that we can never get back once it is used. To wisely use our time is one of the most crucial acts of stewardship.

Do a budget of your time.

Are you doing too many things?

Are you setting aside enough time for family, God, relaxation, etc?

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Cut your TV viewing in half this week.

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Travel as lightly as possible – it makes travel time more enjoyable, and often is a great consideration for others.

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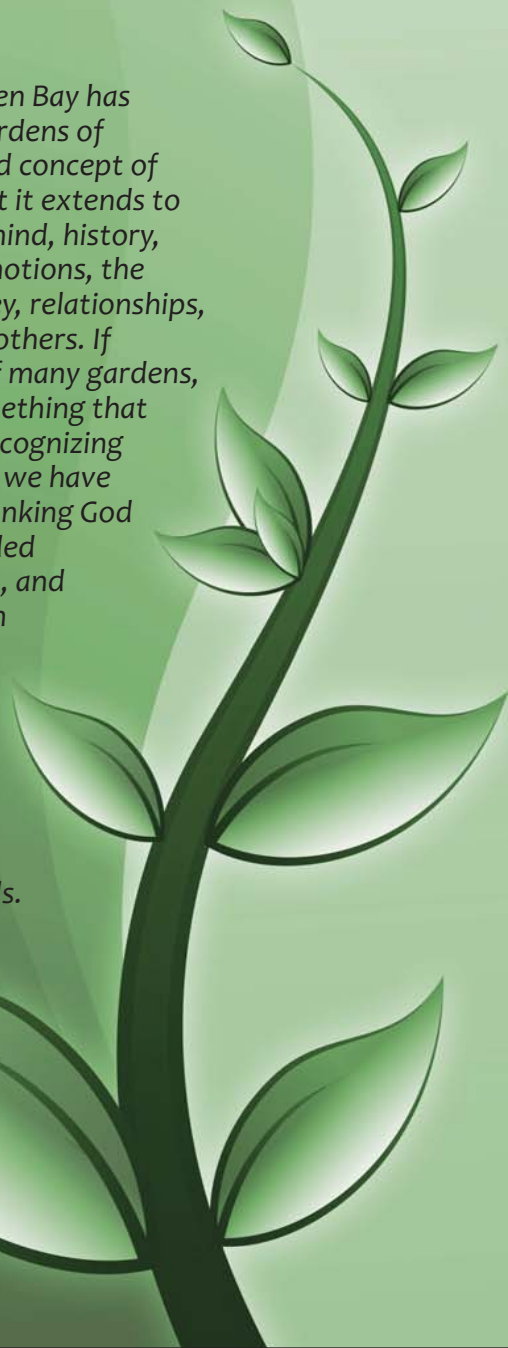
Every evening, set out the things you'll need first thing the next morning. It will make your mornings easier and less hurried.

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Make a point of being on time for meetings this week.

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Get caller ID and don't answer the phone at dinner or other important times. It will cost money, but it is a good way to be a better steward of your time.



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The Garden of Work

We spend so much time at work, yet we rarely think about how we can be good stewards in the forums where we spend substantial amounts of time.

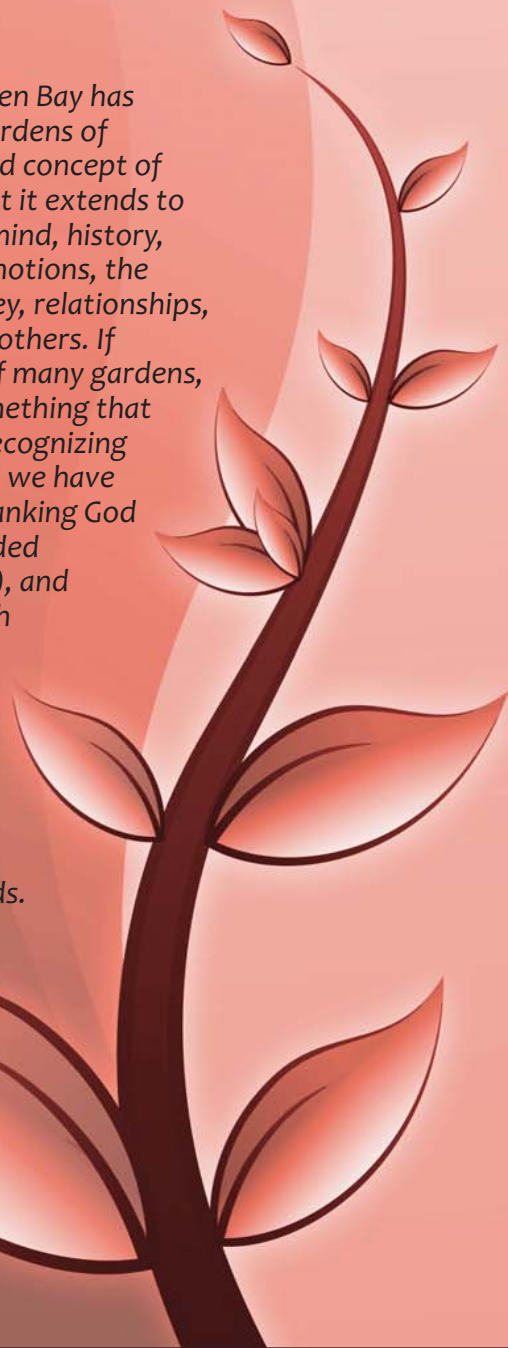
Exercise sound and just business and labor practices.

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Take care in your job performance.

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Think about how your work is an act of stewardship – of collaborating with God in the work of creation and redemption. The connection may not seem obvious, but it is there.



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Sharing and Returning Our Gifts – The Harvest

The harvest of our stewardship efforts occurs when we share our gifts with others, and when we return a proper portion of our gifts to the Lord through the Church. Sharing our gifts is where we see how productive the yield from our stewardship is.

Find a charitable event to go to for your weekend entertainment.

Next time you receive some windfall, give 10% to charity.

Support programs that help respect human life.

Bring some donation for your food bank to Mass next weekend.
Put your donation in your car now so you don't forget.

Give blood. It's the gift of life, and it costs just one hour of time.

Carry fast food restaurant gift certificates to give to the homeless who are asking for help.

Pray for those in government.

Before you throw anything of value away, check the Web for recycling possibilities. You can find websites to help put things as diverse as printer cartridges, bicycles, and eyeglasses to use again for someone who really needs them.

Plan ahead for those special collections. There is about one per month, so budget at least an extra Sunday donation every month.

If you see a two-for-one sale for something you'd usually buy, buy the second one and donate it to charity.

Next time you are stuck in a line, say some prayers for those in need of help – someone you know who is ill, people suffering the world over, etc. It is a good way to use what might otherwise be wasted time.

Fill out that organ donor card on the back of your driver's license now. You can also find them on the Web.

Donate complimentary shampoos, soaps, etc., from hotels to your local St. Vincent De Paul or shelter for the homeless.

Do a budget of your time and money. Set a goal for what percent of each you'll give to church and charity.

