Dear Education Majors—

This week’s letter centers on the relationship between **stewardship and teaching**. Admittedly, the topic doesn’t sound like a particularly thrilling one. And, it’s not immediately clear how these two notions go together, let alone what their connection means for you as a teacher. But please bear with me, because you might be surprised at the professional and personal relevance that the concept of stewardship holds for you.

Let’s start with the meaning of the term ‘steward.’ **A steward assumes personal responsibility for taking care of another person’s property or belongings.** In practice, stewards conduct, supervise, or manage something valuable entrusted to their care. Whereas a guardian merely protects the valuable, a steward’s job is to enrich it. In one Gospel, for instance, when a servant who failed to increase the value of the precious metal he was given to steward (a weight known back then as a talent), he was chastised by his master. The implicit message here is that we are all expected to use what we more commonly think of as our talents for the greater good.

In this more religious sense, stewardship is based on the belief that God is the true owner of each person's possessions, and that we are accountable for their care and use. Put differently, nothing we have really belongs to us; rather, **we are called to devote all that we have been given toward bettering the world.** As an educator, it’s been useful for me to think of teaching as a form of stewardship in three interconnected ways.

**First, teaching is a matter of stewarding the special gifts that have been given to you.** The fact that you are here at Marquette suggests you’ve been the beneficiary of many gifts in the form of talents and dispositions. Chances are that you are intellectually and interpersonally gifted, as well as full of passion, immersed in feelings of care for others, and blessed with an enormous capacity to learn and develop. Every one of these attributes positions you to become an outstanding teacher.

As the recipient of these gifts, you have the obligation to steward them to the greatest extent if you are to fulfill your promise to the world. You must convert them toward a greater good, in this case teaching. One author, Lynn Miller, puts it this way, “Stewardship is the act of organizing your life so that God can spend you.”

**Second, teaching is about stewarding the children and adolescents who have been entrusted to you by their parents.** There is no greater gift to a human being than a child. Consequently, turning one’s children over to schools and teachers is no small
matter. On the contrary, parents will be counting on you not only to teach their most prized possessions, but to love, nurture, and protect them. The very best ones will demand that you to use all of your God-given talents to shape the mind, hearts, and souls of their beloved offspring. In other words, as their stewards, they will expect you to enrich them.

**Third, being an exemplary teacher means stewarding with an eye to the future.**

Don’t “just” steward your students by teaching them to master content and skills. For systemic change to occur, you must also impart the values of social justice to them. Fill their minds and hearts with noble dreams and goals and inspire your protégés to “Be the Difference,” too. In other words, use your many talents to steward your students in a socially glorious way -- **one that transforms them into gifts to the world.** Help them to become the human being you aspire be. Mahatma Gandhi put it well when he said, “Be the change you want to see in the world.”

Looking to the future also requires teachers to do a different kind of mentoring -- not only of new teachers for induction purposes, but also pre-service teachers and even colleagues and parents on occasion. In addition, **the most forward thinking teachers volunteer their time, energy, and services and even their financial gifts to help prepare the teachers of the future,** especially with scholarship support. It’s all part of stewarding your gifts for the betterment of humankind, the spiritual version of “paying it forward.” In fact, our patron saint, Ignatius of Loyola, prayed to be taught generosity and to give “without counting the cost.”

To sum up, we are all expected to share our earthly prosperity with others through the joy of giving. As a teacher, you’ll have plenty of opportunities to steward your personal gifts, the children who have been entrusted to you, and the future of our planet, and my fond hope is that you’ll do just that.

Sincerely,

\[Signature\]

Dr. Bill Henk, Dean
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