



A Guide for the Stewardship Lay Witness

Diocese of Marquette
Department of Stewardship & Development

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Role of the Lay Witness

One of the most effective means of presenting the stewardship message is through the Stewardship Lay Witness Talk. This talk is usually given after the homily by people who are already practicing stewardship in their own lives. It may be given by an individual, or a couple. In some cases, even children may participate. The talk has two purposes: to inspire people to become good stewards; and to share real life examples of how stewardship is lived.

Sample Outline for composing Lay Witness Talk

1. Introduce Yourself - While many of your fellow parishioners will know you, some may not. Give a description of your family, the number of years in the parish, etc.
2. Properly Define Christian Stewardship - It is a response we make in gratitude to God for What He has given to us. It is an intentional, planned, proportionate giving of our time, talent and treasure.
3. Discuss How You Began Practicing Stewardship - When did you first become aware of the concept? Did you have reservations? Be honest about your first reactions. People will relate to any feelings of “discomfort”. How did your family react to the idea? Was the initial “plunge” difficult? How did you go about it?
4. When did you begin to experience the benefits? Speak of the effect that Stewardship has had on your faith life. Use anecdotes from your own family life if possible. How do you and your family give of our time and talent? Where you able to give a full tithe (10%) right away? If not, how are you working toward that goal?
5. Urge your fellow parishioners to get involved. - Invite the congregation to join you and your family in making your parish a stewardship parish. Ask them to look at all that God has given to them and make a generous response to his many gifts.

Tips for Presenting Lay Witness Talk

An important part of people's acceptance of the concept of stewardship is the personal witness and individual testimony you provide with your presence and the way you give your talk. The following are tips you should consider in preparing your comments:

- Prepare your personal remarks so you are comfortable with them. Use your own style, wording and delivery. Write Out Your Talk Word For Word. Then, if you feel comfortable with the approach, use notes or key words to guide you through your presentation so that is more natural.
- For you to give a good presentation, it is best for you to rehearse your talk aloud. If you just practice reading it silently, you won't have the same effect. If it is possible, practice it in the church when no one is there, using the sound system. Be comfortable enough with your material so that you can look up from your notes and make eye contact. In a large church, remember to turn to the sides occasionally to include everyone.
- If you are doing a renewal, ask the person who did the talk last year to listen to your talk and make suggestions from their experience. Ask the pastor to listen to you deliver your talk in the church and offer suggestions.
- Nervousness can make your throat dry. If you think this may happen, have a glass of water in an unobtrusive place...and use it if you need it.
- Above all, be sincere, enthusiastic and friendly.

Some Do's and Don't for the Lay Witness

DO *(If time permits and if any of these fit into your talk):*

- Explain that stewardship means giving of the "first fruits," not what is left over
- Talk about the personal need of each Christian to give back in gratitude.
- Say "Many of you know from your own giving experience that what I have told you is true." (Acknowledging that you are not in this alone.)
- Stress the sense of joy and fulfillment that comes to those who give God the first share of the time, talent, and treasure as a way of expressing their gratitude and trust in God.
- Talk about intentional, planned and proportionate giving. Explain what it means to you to give from your substance.
- Emphasize that it is important to give all three "time, talent and treasure".
- Explain that stewardship involves not only church (parish and diocese); it also includes community

DON'T

- talk in bargaining terms (e.g. “I gave this much time or treasure and God gave me this in return.”)
- Stress church needs or budgets.
- Talk in dollar or time amounts: “If everyone could give \$10 a week”...”we need \$2 more a week”...”give our fair share”...”if everyone could give 3 hours per week”
- Use threats of possible consequences stemming from the failure to give: “We won’t be able to heat or air-condition the church”...”We’ll have to close the school”.
- Suggest that Parish Stewardship is an obligation.

The most important goal of living a life based on the principles of stewardship is a deepening of faith...a real spiritual conversion. Your sharing your spiritual journey with others members of your parish family is a unique gift and a true statement of your commitment to stewardship. You are showing your gratitude by this sharing. Thank You.

Getting Started ...and Ending Up

Many find that the hardest part of a talk is getting started and winding up. To open your stewardship talk simply introduce yourself: “Good morning, (evening) I’m Jane Doe and this is my husband John. We are parishioners here at St. Joseph’s along with our three children, Manny, Moe and Jack. We’d like to share with you what stewardship means to our family and how it has affected our lives...”

The following is a suggested closing paragraph: “As we continue with our liturgy this morning (evening), and our gifts are brought forward, let each of us ask ourselves if this gift of our treasure which we offer today, is truly a measure of the gratitude we have for what we have been given. Let us look at what we give to our church and the community in terms of time and service, and ask ourselves if this, also, is proportionate to God’s gifts to us. Let us remember that the God who takes care of the lilies of the field and the birds of the air, will likewise take care of each of us when we give generously and trust in His love.

Examples of Lay Witness Presentations

The following are actual presentations given by lay witnesses. While these presentations are individualized and cannot be used as they are, they serve as models for how lay witness presenters can express their thoughts.

Lay Witness Sample Presentation #1

Stewardship means different things to different people. Let me share with you what stewardship has come to mean to me. Reflecting back on the time spent growing up in Ohio, I've realized more and more not only how loving my parents were but also how wise they were. I learned a lot from my parents, but there are four things I learned from their example that have had a particular impact on my life. First was that God loves us. He is good and we can trust Him. Second was that each of us is given certain gifts and talents and one of our responsibilities in life is to discover what those gifts and talents are, develop them and use them to benefit others. Third was that to whom more is given, more is expected. Fourth was that having a job and spending time with your family is important but not enough. We also need to spend time being with and helping others.

With that kind of learning and my parents, kind of example, I did not have a great deal of difficulty in grasping the concept of stewardship of time and talent. I didn't call it that, but I did it. From the time I was in high school onward, I made sure I spent time doing things for and with other people, mostly through different types of volunteer work. As I continued to give of my time and talent, I realized that I was growing spiritually. God and other people became a more important part of my life.

After graduating from college and moving to Charlotte, I continued to give of my time and talent through various church groups and community boards. Yet something was still missing. You see, I gave of my time and talent but not my treasure. I reasoned that I spent so much time in church and community activities that I didn't need to give regularly to the church or other community groups. Sure, I gave some, but it was sporadic and unplanned.

It wasn't until my wife and I made an "Engaged Encounter" seven years ago that I started to look even more seriously at my relationship with God. We realized that we couldn't hold back on any area of our giving because God wasn't holding back on any area of His giving. We also decided that we wanted God to be the center of our marriage. That led us to a decision to start giving of our treasure in a planned and proportionate way. We started giving two percent of our income to the church and other charities in 1984. Five years later, we are giving at eight percent of our income to the church and other charities.

As we continued to give, we've learned that we are growing more spiritually and that our faith is deepening. By giving as we have, we have tried to place material things and money in their proper perspective. That has caused us to look at what we need versus what we want. For example, when we bought a new home almost two years ago, we

bought a somewhat smaller house than we might have if we hadn't been practicing stewardship of treasure.

Stewardship has become a way of life for us. It's not always easy, but we try to live it. Presently, I am spending eight hours a week in volunteer work outside of my job and my wife is spending three hours per week in volunteer work. In the area of treasure, 80 percent of our giving is church-related while the other 20 percent goes to community agencies. My wife and I are planning to move to the biblical tithe, 10 percent of our income, next month.

Stewardship of time, talent and treasure has been and will continue to be an important part of our lives.

Lay Witness Sample Presentation #2

Stewardship: What is it? How do we do it? Will we like it? Does it hurt? Will it work for us? Why should we do it?

These are many of the questions that passed through my mind as we first considered stewardship as a program in my parish. We looked at various programs in existence and the more I looked at them the more I became convinced stewardship was something our parish should do. I guess I was really experiencing my own conversion to stewardship as a way of life. I kept seeing that the Church could never flourish and grow if everyone was supporting it like it was, with a contribution each week that I would never miss.

As I look back at my own decision on stewardship and its maturation in the last five years, I notice that my ideals have changed some. There were lots of reasons that I felt we should begin stewardship in our family. God has been very good to us. My husband and I have two healthy, happy children.

We have finally passed through the struggling years in our own business and now had time to think about other things. As I began to think about the church and what it meant to me, I realized that if everyone was making the kind of limited volunteer and financial commitment that I was then the church would not be here for my children. There was no other way it could continue with no higher level of support from me and other parishioners.

Besides, I had great expectations of the Church. It should be well equipped to teach my children all about the wonders of God. It should be able to care for the sick, feed the needy, care for the elderly.

If my expectations were right, then I had to do my part to make them a reality. I was already giving some time to the church and with that time my talents. But there had to be a strong commitment of time and a commitment of treasure if the church was going to be able to do all the things I wanted it to.

Once I decided that perhaps stewardship was something our family needed to think about, I was rather hesitant to bring it up for family discussion. My husband is non-Catholic. Would he feel the same as I do? How would we handle contributions of time and treasure to two churches? After we talked about how we felt and agreed that it was something we would try, my husband offered a simple solution. We would give one-fourth of our treasure and time to his church and three-fourths to my church since our two children were members of our parish. We have never had a problem with this method.

Since we made our decision on stewardship, I think our outlook on lots of things has changed. We have become more supportive of various worthwhile needs and organizations in the community. I think it opened an avenue of thought that allows us to give without always questioning what we will get in return.

I came to embrace stewardship through the church but I have grown in stewardship to include the entire community. I feel that God expects us to minister to all people. My gift that fulfills my stewardship may be given to anyone who needs it. It is the giving and the support of God's children that is important. The spiritual rewards, the feeling of accomplishment that you are following God's way are the important things that you will reap from stewardship. You will know you are succeeding when the spirituality and feelings of stewardship far surpass the questions of how much you should give.

Lay Witness Sample Presentation #3

My first encounter with Stewardship was in 1987. I sat in my parish church in Columbus, Georgia and listened to two people from Jacksonville, Florida tell us their story and ask us to consider giving a percentage of our income and more of our time to the church and community.

Up until that time, I had thought I was doing pretty well. I had always given what I thought was generously to the church...especially in terms of money. I had been taught to "contribute to the support of the church", both in the parochial school I attended in Philadelphia, and by my parents. When we were growing up, there was no Saturday Vigil Mass. Saturday night was the time to get ready for Sunday. Baths, polishing shoes, washing and curling hair and getting our church envelopes ready were all part of the ritual. My Dad put \$5.00 in his envelope in the 1950's and each of us four kids put \$.10 in ours. These were placed on the mantle behind my mom and dad's wedding picture, ready to be picked up on our way to church on Sunday morning. When I grew up and got a job, I put \$5.00 in my envelope. I figured that was what grownups did.

We never consciously thought about the giving of time. It was just sort of expected that we would run errands for our neighbor who had only one leg, or cut the grass of the elderly lady across the street. It was just part of what you did when you took food to a family who had a death or someone in the hospital. These were the things I continued to do as a adult without ever giving much thought as to how much time was involved or why I was doing it.

It was only after listening to the folks from Jacksonville that I began to realize I wasn't even close to giving in proportion to what I had. My dad's \$5.00 in the 1950's and mine in the 1980's were entirely two different things. The little "good deeds" for other people were nice, but kind of sporadic.

My life has been richly blessed. I had a family who loved deeply, parents who sacrificed to bring up four children and instilled in each of us a strong sense of church and morality. I was well educated, had a job, a home, friends and reasonably good health. God had given me many blessings...and I had to give serious thought as to how I was responding to his gifts. It took a while for me to do something, because I didn't think I could raise my level of monetary giving, and I was pretty sure I didn't have any "spare time" to volunteer. I eventually decided to "take the plunge", but only on a trial basis of three months. I would give a tithe of 10% to my church and other charities, and I would find two more hours each week to volunteer for something. I fully expected to be able to say at the end of three months, "OK, Lord. I tried, but it doesn't work." That way, I figured I would be "off the hook".

Well, at the end of three months, I found that all of the bills had been paid, I wasn't suffering from malnutrition, I saved some money, bought clothes and went to the movies a few times. I also found out that I wasn't worrying about money nearly as much as I had been. I had become a reading tutor in our county literacy program and loved it. I obviously wasn't "off the hook", but was hooked.

Since that summer in 1987 the one overwhelming change in life has been a deepening of my faith. I really trust that God loves me and will take care of me. He has done it...even when I wasn't sure it could be done.

I guess my response to those who question the concepts of Stewardship, or who are hesitant, is this: At least give it a try. Give God the opportunity to show you that He is a loving and generous God. He can only do that when we give up control and take that step in faith.

Financial Stewardship Educational/Lay Witness Presentation #4

I was invited to speak to you today about the financial stewardship of Precious Blood Parish. I am a member of St. Michael Parish in Marquette. I am also employed as the Development Director for the Diocese of Marquette and in that capacity I work daily with people and with issues related to stewardship and development. My work keeps me engaged in the business developing resources for the good of our church.

I am not here to speak with you today because your parish is "in trouble" financially. It is my understanding that Precious Blood has a steady offertory income of about \$3,500 each week; that the parish UPCS goal, which has averaged about \$22,000 over the past five years, is always exceeded; and that parishioners are forthcoming with money for special projects like a new roof for the church. You are to be commended for those achievements.

My goal this morning is to help you see the importance of your giving, to you personally and to the future of this parish. Is your giving helping you to grow spiritually; and is your giving providing sufficient resources for this parish's mission and ministry?

My experience with financially stewarding the Church stems from my earliest memories of childhood. My father was a Catholic seminary and school teacher for nearly 30 years and my mother, to this day, remains deeply committed to music liturgy at mass. As a child I often overheard talk that had to do with lack of finances at the church. In my mind I formed a picture of a church that perpetually lived on the edge of financial insolvency. The faith commitment of my parents, however, formed a twin picture in my mind of a church that offered great rewards when the financial challenges were faced. As a very young child I understood that giving time, talent and treasure to the church was not an option. It took me much longer to understand why.

Financially stewarding the church is a great challenge. Research findings sharply define the difference between high per-capita giving congregations and poverty-syndrome churches. High per-capita giving congregations share some common characteristics of success. **One of those characteristics is a formal renewal of stewardship every year.**

For example, a stewardship renewal campaign is a strategy that many of our Upper Peninsula parishes use. Once each year parishioners are asked to reflect on their giving to the parish and to make a written pledge of their total commitments of money, time and talent for the coming year. This campaign reinforces some very important stewardship principles such as planning and prioritizing what is important in our lives. We know that if something is really important to us we will plan to see that it happens.

There was a time in my life, not too long ago, when my husband and I would open our checkbook on Sunday morning and determine at that moment how much we thought we could afford to give that day. Our parish was most unlucky at the end of the month because it always seems that there's too much month left at the end of the paycheck. Financially stewarding our parish was a difficult obligation. We never questioned the importance of faith and church in our lives, but our giving certainly did not reflect that it was a priority.

In my work as Development Director for the diocese, I've witnessed, over and over again, the pure joy that comes to those who give generously. I finally decided to let go of this feeling of obligation and open myself up to the challenge of stewardship. I boldly insisted one year that every member of my family make some sort of commitment of time, talent and treasure to our home parish. I love them enough to patiently put up with the complaints that accompany pushing someone beyond their immediate comfort zone.

After a few years, it gradually became easier for each of us to renew our commitments and our involvement in our parish increased. My whole family feels a greater sense of pride and ownership in our parish because our actions are doing more than ever to communicate the priority that God and Church play in our lives. We also decided to take a step each year in our level of giving to our parish. Now our parish receives a pre-determined amount that my husband and I agree on at the beginning of the year. We

no longer give what's left over at the end of the paycheck. Instead, our gifts are planned, more proportionate to what we have, and seen as an opportunity to enhance the mission of our parish. Most importantly, taking a step in our financial stewardship has been a spiritual growth opportunity that has spilled over to other parts of our life. Our diocesan church and other favorite charities are receiving more, too.

High per-capita giving parishes embrace the spirit of maximum giving, off the top, out of gratitude. Parishes that multiply the ways and means in which people can give are promoting good stewardship. Research proves that giving is a learned behavior. People whose churches ask them to put their financial commitment on paper give, on average, twice as much as people who do not. Regular giving opportunities at any parish include the Sunday offertory, building funds, missions, S.O.S. calls for special needs, a "wish list" for specific items or building repairs, wills, memorials, and endowments that help secure the future.

Another characteristic of high per-capita giving congregations is percentage-of-income giving, or tithing. Giving statistics tell us that people asked to make commitments based on a percentage of their income give an average of three times as much as those who base their decisions on a dollar amount.

The practice of tithing is deeply rooted in the Old Testament and was reinforced by the teaching of Jesus and the example of early Christians. True tithing means giving 10% of your total gross income. It is commonly suggested that 5% of this be given to your home parish, 1% to your diocesan annual appeal, and 4% to other charities.

To help demonstrate what tithing means in terms of dollars for Precious Blood Parish, I used the internet and logged onto the U.S. Census Bureau's website. Don't worry, I did not find individual income statistics. But I did find income statistics for your county. A basic formula used to determine the potential Sunday collection in a parish is to take the number of registered families and multiply it by the average annual income of households. The number of registered families at Precious Blood is 472. The average household income for Menominee County is \$32,888. These two numbers multiplied together represent the combined income of all parishioners. If we take 5% of that number and divide it by 52 weeks in a year, we arrive at \$14,926. The potential for the average weekly collection at this parish is nearly \$15,000. The current average weekly collection is \$3,500, or barely 25% of the potential. We cannot go by statistics alone, but the point is that there is great potential for increasing the weekly collection at this parish.

For most Catholics, tithing would represent a substantial leap from their current level of church and charitable giving. Fortunately, we have the example of Jesus, who was a patient and loving teacher, who gave us the model of stewardship to follow as a way of life.

If we take stewardship seriously as a response of disciples of Jesus, we soon discover that the agenda switches from increased financial generosity to the far more challenging call to faith and commitment. Though we might initiate a commitment to stewardship in

light of financial needs, it is amazing what happens when we recognize the far more basic and demanding challenge of stewardship.

Many Catholics are generous in giving of themselves and their resources to the Church. Many others, however, do not respond in proportion to what they possess. The result is a lack of resources which seriously hampers the Church's ability to carry out its mission and obstructs people's growth as disciples.

You might be wondering if you should personally give more. Even though your parish may appear to be in good financial condition, expenses continue. There are ongoing needs for things such as building improvement, salary increase, utility increases, etc. Your church leaders probably could expand programs and services if more funds were available. A growing number of parishes are extending their mission and ministry by tithing on their Sunday collections and distributing the money to the needy of the community and the world.

It should not be the apparent needs of the church that drive our giving. Our most important consideration should be our need, as Christian Stewards, to be grateful for all that God has provided us, to cherish and tend what we have in a responsible and accountable manner, to share in justice and love with others, and to return with increase to the Lord.

Every act of financial giving is a testimony that we are willing to trust God in our life. Take time to regularly examine how you spend your time, talents and money. Do your expenditures show what you truly value in life? Does your current level of giving adequately reflect your gratitude to God? Perhaps there is room in your life to take a step in your giving. When we challenge ourselves to grow spiritually through generous giving, our faith holds great rewards for us.

For additional information in preparing Stewardship Lay Witness talks please contact Terri Gudzinski, Executive Director of Stewardship & Development, Diocese of Marquette, 1004 Harbor Hills Dr, Marquette, MI 49855 telephone 906/227-9108 or email tgadzinski@dioceseofmarquette.org