

SHARING YOUR STEWARDSHIP JOURNEY

The most effective stewardship programs include public witnessing by people who are already practicing stewardship in their own lives. Such talks are especially powerful when given by lay people. The Lay Witness talk has two purposes: to inspire people to become good stewards and share “daily life” examples of stewardship. A Lay Witness talk should include four basic elements: personalization, scripture reference, detail and invitation.

PERSONALIZATION

People love to hear a story. A story catches attention. A story brings an idea down to earth and makes it real. Thus it is important that the stewardship pulpit talk include a personal story about how stewardship is real in your life. Your story could be about any of the following:

- When and how you first realized the importance of stewardship.
- How stewardship impacts your everyday family life at home, at work, or in the parish.
- What joys you have experienced as a result of your stewardship.
- How you have overcome a challenge to your stewardship.

SCRIPTURAL REFERENCE

Stewardship is not some new idea that your parish or the Catholic Church just invented to raise money. Stewardship is a concept that is as old as Sacred Scripture. Throughout the Old and New Testament, God has clearly asked us to live as stewards, giving back to him a grateful portion of all that God has given us. It is important that your pulpit talk include a reference to scripture.

DETAIL

It is critical that your talk gives parishioners clear details on what it is the parish wants them to do.

- Talk about the Ministry Fair and the Time and Talent Catalog. Let the congregation know that their involvement is needed and wanted.
- Explain the Intention Card: practical suggestions for filling out the Declaration of Intention, and the importance of completing this.

INVITATION

Personally invite your fellow parishioners to commit to a life of stewardship.

- Invite them to reflect upon their own blessings and personal gifts.
- Challenge them to consider if their giving reflects their blessings.
- Remind them that stewardship is a total giving of ourselves—including a balance of time, talent and treasure. Do not apologize for talking about money.
- Invite them to know the joy that comes from sharing their gifts.

THE LAY WITNESS TALK

1. Introduce yourself.
Give a description of your family, the number of years in the parish, etc.
2. Properly define Christian stewardship

Stewardship is a response one makes in gratitude for what has been granted us. Stewardship is an intentional, planned, proportionate giving of our time, talent and treasure. Stewardship: 1) asks that we help each other recognize the gifts and talents with which God has blessed us and the ways in which we have been blessed through the gifts and talents of others. 2) invites us to help discern, call forth and continually encourage one another to use the gifts and talents with which God has blessed us according to God's will. 3) challenges us to share our time, talent and treasure beyond what we believe we can do so we can grow, individually and collectively, as God desires.

3. Discuss how you began practicing stewardship.
When did you first become aware of this concept? What did you think when you first heard about it? What happened in your life to cause you to make changes in the sharing of your blessings? How did your family react to the idea? Was the initial "leap of faith" difficult? How did you go about it? What motivated you to make a change in the way you were living?
4. Share the effects of living stewardship.
How has living a life of stewardship changed your life? Your faith life? The way you live in our world? Talk about your own growth as a giver, the challenges it presented, and the benefits and blessings that resulted.
5. Invite parishioners into this way of living.
Invite the congregation to join you and your family into a life of stewardship. Ask parishioners to reflect upon God's multiple gifts in their lives, and invite them to lovingly share of their time, talent and treasure as a way of thanking God for their abundance.

LAY WITNESS DO'S:

1. Do emphasize that stewardship means a total giving of ourselves. God owns everything. We are only on earth to share our gifts.
2. Do remind people that the stewardship way of life is deeply rooted in sacred scripture, both the Old and New Testament. (Remember, over half of Christ's parables related to money and stewardship).
3. Do ask people to reflect on what is good in their lives. Ask them if God gets any credit for this goodness. Ask them how they show their thankfulness to God for this goodness.
4. Do talk about giving a grateful share of time, talent and treasure. Stress that a grateful share is the first share. Explain that stewardship means giving of the "first fruits," not what is left over.
5. Do present stewardship as a total way of Christian life- a way we make choices, a way we live everyday of our lives. Explain that stewardship touches every area of our lives—faith, family, friends, workplace, community, Church.
6. Do talk about the importance of planning. Explain that stewardship means making a commitment to give a definite percentage on a regular basis, not just once in awhile. Encourage people to know what percentage they currently give to God. Also encourage people to have a plan for gradually increasing that percentage to an amount that truly reflects their gratitude to God.
7. Do talk about the need each of us has to give back in gratitude.

8. Do share your struggles with stewardship as well as your triumphs. People will appreciate your honesty and will be more open to your message if they can identify with you.
9. Do emphasize the sense of peace that comes when we put God first.
10. Do arouse feelings of gratitude for all the gifts God gives to us.
11. Do be well prepared.
12. Do have your talk reviewed by someone you trust before you give it.

LAY WITNESS TALK DON'TS:

1. Do not talk in “bargaining” terms (“I gave this and God gave me this in return.”)
2. Stress church needs or budgets. Stewardship is about our need to give back, not the parish’s need for “things.”
3. Talk in dollar or time amounts: “If everyone could give \$10 a week.” Or “We need \$2 more a week from everyone.” Or “You need to give your fair share.” Let people decide for themselves what is a grateful and proportionate gift.
4. Don’t stress the 10% tithe as a strict and intimidating obligation. This will seem unrealistic for most people and only sour them on the whole concept of stewardship.
5. Use threats of possible consequences stemming from the failure to give: “We won’t be able to heat or air-condition the church.” Or “We’ll have to close the school.”
6. Suggest that stewardship is mandatory or an obligation.

LAY WITNESS TALK PREPARATION SUGGESTIONS:

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 present your stewardship journey. The following are suggestions in preparing your comments:

1. Pray. Spend time talking and listening to God. Reflect on the many blessings you have received. Think about where you are on your personal stewardship journey and how you arrived there. Allow the Spirit to guide your words as you begin to prepare to share your journey.
2. Prepare your talk so you are comfortable with it. Use your own style, wording and delivery. Write out your talk using numbered or bulleted lists rather than long sentences so it is easier for you to make eye contact with your audience. Use a font size that is easy to see—at least 12 or 14 point and consider double-spacing.
3. It is best 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.
4. Be sincere, enthusiastic and friendly. It is more important to be comfortable and share your experience from the heart than to be eloquent.

PRESENTATION DAY SUGGESTIONS:

1. Plan to arrive at least 15 minutes before the scheduled mass time.
2. Identify yourself to the celebrant before the liturgy begins. Be sure to confirm any logistics such as:
 - a). From where will you be speaking?

- b). Where will you sit—near the altar, in a front pew, on the altar?
- c). Will you process in with the celebrant, altar servers, etc.?
- 3. Speak slowly, loudly and clearly. It is important that your message is understood.
- 4. Be prepared and brief. Your talk should be no more than 8 minutes.
- 5. Dress appropriately.
- 6. Greet people after mass at the back of the church. This is an opportunity to talk informally with parishioners who may want to meet you.

A DIFFERENT TWIST ON THE LAY WITNESS TALK....

In some parishes where stewardship lay witnessing has been happening for many years, there may be a feeling that we have said and done all this before. The stewardship committee may be searching for a new way to reach the parish community. Before you try something different for your pulpit talk, remember that personal witness is critically important in stewardship education. Be sure to incorporate personal witness into any new approach.

Do not let your creativity overshadow the stewardship message. You may entertain the congregation, but motivating them to more fully embrace stewardship is most essential.

COUPLE WITNESSING:

Have a husband and wife share the speaking. They can discuss how together, as a family, they have come to live stewardship more fully.

GROUP WITNESSING:

Have a variety of parishioners come forward to present a quick thought or witness on stewardship. The group could include: a man, a woman, an older adult, a younger adult, people representing a variety of parish organizations. These speakers would be assigned to give personal or scriptural reflection and would invite the congregation into this way of life. One person, serving as the coordinator of the group, would explain what you are going to do and would end the presentation with a broader invitation.

DRAMATIZATION:

A mini-play could catch attention in a parish that has done pulpit talks for years. Some ideas are listed below:

- One parishioner explaining to a new or skeptical parishioner what stewardship means personally and for the parish.
- A staged radio or television interview about stewardship.
- Children (real children or adults acting like children) explaining stewardship as if through the eyes of kids commenting on their parents' stewardship.
- A saint- possibly the parish patron saint- returned to earth to try to understand our modern day needs and wants vs. stewardship.

SAMPLE STEWARDSHIP LAY WITNESS TALK:

Introduction:

Good morning. My name is Steve Smith and I am here to talk to you for just a few minutes about stewardship.

Stewardship, as you know, is giving some of your time, talent and treasure back to God in appreciation for all that God has given to you. I want to share with you my personal experience in trying to be a steward in this parish.

Personalization:

I am thankful to both God and to our parish for allowing me the opportunity to participate as an active member in this great parish of ours. I have worked with many of you with our children's sports program and our parish picnics. When I first came to this parish I did not have a clue how I would be able to participate in this great community that many of you and those who came before us had built. At our first parents' meeting I took a daring first step and raised my hand and said, "Sure, I'll get involved. What do you want me to do?"

Boy, did my life change! I began associating names with those faces I would see at Mass each week. Parish was no longer a bunch of strangers, but a group of friends, a family. After organization meetings I would find myself energized and eager to attend the next meeting. I can't begin to tell you the joy and happiness I have received as a member actively contributing and working in this parish. My involvement provided me with a sense of belonging. Accomplishments were being made and I was participating.

Scripture

I also discovered that it was true what Jesus told us in Matthew 6: 21—"For where your treasure is, there also will your heart be." In keeping with God's command to us to give back our first fruits, my wife and I have made a commitment to give a percentage of our income every month to the Church before we do anything else. This isn't always easy, but it is always very gratifying to know that we are doing the right thing and we are helping our parish stay strong. And I can tell you that somehow God has provided for us and our heart truly is in our parish and that is a joyful thing.

Detail

I don't tell you all of this to brag about what I have done, but rather to encourage you, too, to know the joy and happiness that my family and I have found by giving time, talent and treasure to our parish. This weekend after all Masses we are having our Ministry Fair. I encourage you to take a few minutes to stop by and see all that is happening in our parish. Pick up a copy of our parish Time and Talent Catalog. (Hold up a copy). Can you give us a little of your time? Do you have some special talent you could share? The catalog lists all parish organizations—I bet you will find an organization that will be a good fit in which to share your time and talent. Does your financial support of this parish truly reflect all of the blessings God has given to you? I promise you that you will see that your gifts of treasure to this parish help us do God's work.

Later this week/month you will receive a letter from PASTOR NAME, a brochure and an intention card in the mail. (Hold up a copy of the Declaration of Intention). I encourage you to pray about your gift of treasure to the parish. Does your financial support of PARISH NAME truly reflect all of the blessings God has given to you? This intention card is very important because it will help us plan for our future needs and activities.

Invitation:

I encourage you—from my own personal experience—don't be afraid to get involved. Good things happen when you share of yourself; you will know the deep joy that comes from being a part of God's work here on earth.

In closing, I leave you with this thought on gratitude, by Thomas Merton. To be grateful is to recognize the Love of God in everything he has given us – and He has given us everything. Every breath we draw is a gift of His love, every moment of existence is a grace, for it brings with it immense graces from Him. Gratitude therefore takes nothing for granted, is never unresponsive, is constantly awakening to new wonder and to praise of the goodness of God. For the grateful person knows that God is good, not by hearsay but by experience. And that is what makes all the difference.

Please send a copy of your completed talk to:

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