



A Guide for the Stewardship
Lay Witness

Diocese of Charlotte

Office of Development

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Introduction

Stories—we are all captivated by stories. Magazines and newspapers are always looking for good human-interest stories. Every good homilist or preacher includes a story. I was privileged to hear the late Archbishop Murphy’s last talk on stewardship at the Northwest Regional Stewardship Conference in Seattle. He shared a story of his own life and struggle with leukemia, and the importance to him of the “gift of life” in the form of donations of blood. Jesus, too, used stories to teach others. And finally, the Gospel writers, through their own stories that witness to their lives with Jesus, still bring about life-changing conversions to millions of people—now 2000 years later. Everyone can identify some moment when the life-story of another brought about a change for the better in their own life. It might be a major conversion or just an attitude adjustment, but it made a difference in how you live your own life. Archbishop Murphy’s story made hundreds of people become regular blood-donors.

Far from “tooting our own horn,” every time we share our own story we are witnessing to the generosity of a loving God. It is one of the most powerful and effective means of presenting the stewardship message. Properly prepared, it has the potential of changing peoples’ lives.

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 listed 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. Kunagunda’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.

Sample Lay Witness Presentation #4

—If I had to choose one word to describe stewardship that word would gratitude... stewardship is about gratitude to God for all the gifts He gives us each day, the big gifts and the small ones. Like many people, until recently, I misunderstood stewardship. Quite frankly, I thought it was a "politically correct" way to ask for more money, and that they threw in "time and talent" as a smokescreen. I have come to understand that is not what stewardship is about. The focus is not on the church's need to receive, but rather the individual's need to give. Stewardship is not a one-time contribution to a capital campaign or a series of good deeds. It is about a way of life, it is a way of seeing and being in the world where we see everything as gift from God, and from that realization comes a desire to say thank you to God by sharing the gifts He has given us with others. More than that, stewardship is not just something that happens, it is planned, proportionate and intentional.

My name is Laura G. and I have been a member of this parish for 11 years. I am married and my husband is Bill. We have three sons— Billy, Michael and Kevin. It is my privilege to talk to you about stewardship this morning/evening and what a gift it has been in my life. I will talk about it in terms of the three words we usually associate with stewardship: time, talent and treasure.

Time: There are two questions I would like to consider with regard to time and stewardship. The first one is "How much time will I commit to spending with God?" This is probably the most important aspect of my stewardship. I have found that time spent in prayer and receiving the sacraments is how I am filled. We cannot give what we do not have. I love the analogy of a glass of water in the sink...if we turn on the faucet and let the glass fill up and we keep the faucet running then the glass remains full and the water spills over the top. It is that overflow from which my stewardship comes, at least on my good days! At Mass I receive the love of God through the Eucharist and then I have love to share with others I meet. In the Sacrament of Reconciliation I receive mercy and then I can be merciful to others. In quiet prayer of adoration I find peace and joy, which I can bring to others. I attend daily Mass, spend 30 minutes a day reading scripture and meditation and I try to receive the sacrament of Reconciliation once a month. That is what works for me, that is the time I have committed to spending with God.

The second question is: How much time am I willing to commit to sharing my gifts with others? This has been an important question for me to look carefully at how much time I am giving to others, and to ask myself is it planned and proportional, and am I spending my time wisely? I estimate on average I give eight hours a week to the church and other volunteer activities and I feel that is reasonable in my circumstances as a stay at home mother with older children. But as I have prayed about it, I believe I can give about 10 hours a week. Some weeks I have given less than that, and maybe I can call up the office to see if they need help with some project or stop by and help set up chairs one weekend. Some weeks I have given more than that and perhaps I need to evaluate my commitments to determine if I have balance in my life, keeping in mind my first responsibility is my vocation is as wife and mother.

Talent: When I first thought about what talents God has given me, I drew a blank because I was limiting myself to the "usual" talents we think of relating to church, such as singing or ironing

altar cloths or heading up a committee. Everyone has been blessed, everyone has a talent they can share with the community. After much reflection, it occurred to me... there is one thing I can do....I CAN CRY!!! I am a fabulous crier, I cry easily, I cry often and as I tell my children, "I'm a professional, don't try this at home."

As you might imagine, crying does not feel like a gift most of the time. But I realized that I cry because I am a deeply compassionate person, I have the gift of empathy and I use that gift in bringing communion to the hospital and the homebound. While many times we share a story and a laugh, or rejoice with them in their healing, sometimes all I can do is cry with people. It is in those difficult moments I have realized my ministry is offering my presence, my compassion and most importantly the Eucharist. I jokingly refer to myself as "Jesus' chauffeur."

As always, I find that when I give, I get so much more in return. I want to share with you one story of how a visit to the hospital changed my heart, helped me to know more deeply how much we are all loved and cared for by God. I visited a woman a couple of years ago. I didn't know her. She was not from this area. She was about my age and she shared with me that she had a number of chronic medical problems and had been in and out of the hospital often over the past couple of years. We prayed a little bit together and then she received communion. After a few moments of silence she said to me, "There is a song that I love, I learned it in CCD (faith formation) many years ago. I have asked several people, and I have never met anyone who knows this song. She began to sing it....and I knew that song and, in fact, I remembered most of the words. As I began to sing along with her, the tears rolled down her cheeks, as they did mine. I will never forget the look on her face. We were both overwhelmed with God's love in that moment. What an amazing God we serve! I knew that the scripture verse "God counts the hairs on our heads" was true. He heard her prayer and found someone who could sing that song with her. He hears all of our prayers, big and small, God knows what is important to us, and delights in answering our prayers. In that moment I thought maybe if he counted the hairs on that woman's head, maybe he counts the hairs on mine as well. That scripture is now part of my story, and whenever I hear that verse, I will think of that woman and how God made His love known to her. As a postscript to that story, I have to tell you, the reason no one knows that song is because it is terrible! It is a hokey song from the 1970's and I for one am grateful that it has disappeared from the songs that we teach our children.

Treasure:

I want to begin by thanking this parish for your generosity. This is an amazing parish! When the financial committee presented the numbers on what we needed to build the church, you came through with a significant increase, which has continued week after week without the first stone being put into place. Now that is faith!

Actually those presentations in November helped Bill and I to look at our giving more carefully. In the past, I made all the decisions about finances and it was not something Bill and I talked about very much. I felt pretty good about our giving, figuring Bill and I gave more than most people, so that was good enough. That presentation helped us to look at our giving in another way. Instead of comparing ourselves to others, maybe we should look at how much God has blessed us and give accordingly. As a result Bill and I increased our giving from 6% to 10% of our income.

Another important aspect of stewardship is giving our first fruits, not what is left over (which in our case is not much after the grocery bill with all our growing boys and their friends.) The amount we give each month is a commitment we made to God and to our community. It is one we take very seriously. At the first of the month when Bill makes a deposit, I write a check for 10% of the amount, whatever that might be. Bill gets paid once a month, and so does the church. That is what has worked best for us. Each time I drop the envelope in the basket I say thank you to God for a specific gift in my life that month. It helps to reinforce the connection between giving and gratitude in my own mind. So if you see me holding the basket for a couple of minutes it is because I can't decide what to thank God for this month.

Finally, tithing of our treasure is teaching us about trust. Some months when we have a large amount of unexpected expenses I say to God, "Okay, I want to see how you are going to pull this one off. There is no way that we will be able to make ends meet this month." But He has always come through for us, sometimes in surprising ways. With our tithing, we are trying to put into practice : "Seek God first and the rest will follow."

Summary

I have talked about what stewardship is and is not, and what how I have tried to practice stewardship in my own life. Now I want to get to WIIFM: (What is in it for me?) Why should you consider being a steward of your time, talent and treasure?

1. Stewardship has helped me to know more deeply how much I am loved and cared for by God.
2. Stewardship has helped me to know myself better. I found strength and courage I did not know I possessed. If you told me a couple of years ago that I would be involved in hospital ministry I would have laughed.
3. Stewardship has helped me feel more connected to the community. I have come to know more people as a result of volunteer activities. It feels like home to me. When I am out of town and attend Mass at another church, I miss all of you.
- 4.. Stewardship has helped me to see the hand of God more clearly in my life. As I begin to see everything as gift from God, I begin to look for His blessings in my ordinary day. As Nate, a very wise 8th grader reminded us when saying farewell to Sr. Gert, he believed it is not that she experienced more miracles than the rest of us, it was just that she was better at recognizing them. That is what stewardship has done for me, helped me to recognize the miracles in my own life. We see what we expect to see.

Very simply it feels good to be grateful, to know the source of my blessings and to thank God each day for those gifts. I can hear you now saying to yourself..."Okay, that sounds pretty good for someone else. I would love to be a steward but I can't because..(fill in the blank.)

I am too old..

Ann Matthews was an RCIA sponsor at 94 years old and continued to lector until she was 95.

I am too young...

14 year old Sean Brannan was an impromptu cantor at the 8:30 Mass one Sunday.

I am too busy...

Maybe you can commit to greeting visitors personally at Mass when they introduce themselves at the "Good News".

I can't get out in the evening....

Maybe you can commit to sending a card or calling someone from the parish who is sick or whom you haven't seen in awhile.

We can all do something, we all have gifts to share. The great news is that God meets us just where we are. I ask you to prayerfully reflect on stewardship and how you can say thank you to God. I will leave you with a final question to ponder:

What kind of church would this be, if in response to God's generosity, we asked ourselves each day "What can I do to bring the love of Christ to others?"

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