

Parish Stewardship Effort for Children

A Component of the Parish Stewardship Renewal Effort

Parishes that have completed a successful first-time stewardship effort, and are committed to promoting on-going stewardship awareness, should consider the value of introducing stewardship as a way of life to the children and youth of the parish. They have been eager and interested observers of the adult effort over the past year, and many of your young people already practice stewardship as part of their family's commitment. A focus on Children's Stewardship should be done in addition to the adult stewardship effort with youth lay witnesses either on a separate weekend from the adult lay witnesses, or as part of a Children's Liturgy of the Word.

Suggestions for implementing Children's Stewardship in your parish

- Support -- It is vital to enlist the support of the pastor, pastoral staff, Pastoral Council, Faith Formation Director, and (in parishes with a school) the school principal.
- Education -- Include a 3-5 week mini-lesson on stewardship in your faith formation classes. Feature some of these children's activities such as posters, banners, essays, etc. during the weeks preceding Commitment Sunday.
- Compile a children's time and talent list. Be sure to include adult ministries that would welcome participation on the part of children. (I.e. housecleaning, lawn and garden care, visiting the elderly, etc.) Make that list available to the children.
- Communication -- Introduce the idea of children's stewardship early through bulletin announcements, parish newsletter articles, the website, and social media. Include a note on children's stewardship in the letter from the pastor.
- Children's Commitment Card -- Provide commitment cards for the children to complete their pledge of time, talent, and treasure as their gift of thanksgiving for all of God's blessings in their lives.
- Children's Envelopes -- Consider implementing use of a children's envelope that includes a space for sharing their weekly time and talent as well as treasure.
- Lay Witness -- Ask a young person who is involved in ministry in your parish (altar server, children's lector, children's usher, etc.) to share with the other children what stewardship means to him/her.
- Follow-up -- See to it that each child who completes a commitment card receives a "thank-you" and an invitation to participate in the ministry they indicated. Contact should also be made with parents regarding their role in the child's commitment.
- On-going awareness -- Include a children's corner in your weekly bulletin, highlighting some of the time and talent items mentioned by them in their weekly envelopes. Include children's stewardship notes in parish newsletters, prayers of the faithful, faith formation classes and newsletters.

Children as Lay Witnesses

Just as the adult Lay Witness Testimony is one of the most effective means of presenting the stewardship message to the adults of the parish, a well-done children's Lay Witness Talk can be an effective tool in presenting the stewardship message to the children and youth of the parish. Such a talk should be given by a young person who is already practicing stewardship on a child's level in his or her own life. The talk should be directed to the other children in the parish as a means of inspiring them to become cheerful givers of their time, talent, and treasure, and to share real life examples of how stewardship is lived. This talk should be done in addition to the adult Lay Witness talk, on a separate weekend.

Tips in choosing a child as Lay Witness

- Invite a child who is already actively practicing stewardship in the parish. Children who are altar servers, youth ushers, youth lectors, nursery aids, etc. often show an understanding of stewardship in their lives.
- The child should be someone who attends Mass every weekend with his or her family. Often the entire family is involved in stewardship on both a parish and community level.
- Invite a child who is mature, articulate, and somewhat at ease in front of large groups.
- The child should be willing to work with the pastor (or his designate) in preparing the stewardship talk.
- The child should be willing to speak at all of the weekend Masses on the specified Sunday.

Consider a dialogue or an interview rather than a talk.

Even the most articulate and mature child can sometimes freeze in front of a large congregation at a weekend Mass. To help put the child at ease and make their testimony more effective, consider the following suggestions.

- Invite the children of the parish to come forward and gather around the pastor and the child lay witness. The child who is doing the lay witness talk is now speaking to a much smaller "congregation" of peers, and the adults are privileged to listen without putting undo pressure on the child.
- In parishes that do a children's Liturgy of the Word (separate from the adult Liturgy of the Word), the child's lay witness presentation could take place at that time.
- Introduce the Lay Witness to the group and include a little information on the child's family. Many of the children may already know the lay witness, but some may not.
- Using a dialogue format, "interview" the lay witness with regard to his or her practice of stewardship. Ask the child to explain what stewardship means to him or her, and to share with the group real life experiences that relate to stewardship. The interview should cover all three aspects of stewardship -- time, talent, and treasure. The child should be given a copy of the interview questions and ample time to prepare answers from his or her own experiences well ahead of time. Then a time should be scheduled with the pastor or catechist to rehearse.

Some sample questions for a child's lay witness interview

- We have been promoting stewardship here at [name of parish] for many years. I know you have watched the adults come up here and talk about stewardship. What do you think stewardship is all about?
- Since stewardship is really all about *thanking* God for all the wonderful things He has given to us, what are some ways you use your time to thank God?
- We are reminded that all that we have and all that we are is a gift from God. He gives everyone special talents -- that's just how God makes us -- with special talents. [Name of child], what are some of the special talents that God has given you?
- How do you use those talents here at our parish as a part of stewardship? How do you use your talents in the community? In your school?
- When you share your gifts of talent and time with everybody here at church, how does that make you feel?
- In stewardship, we are told that our money (or treasure) is one part of the many gifts God has given us. How can your treasure be given as a gift of gratitude for God's many blessings?
- You seem to really enjoy living as a good steward of God's many gifts. Do you have anything more you would like to say to your friends?
- How would you encourage the other children to get started in stewardship?

The pastor (or other adult "interviewer") will help guide and direct the lay witness testimony. Using this format, the child won't have to worry about what comes next. He or she can speak from the heart in a relaxed and comfortable manner.

At the conclusion of the dialogue, the pastor should thank the lay witness for sharing his or her thoughts on stewardship and encourage all the children to think about their own special gifts and talents, and how they might use them to serve God and one another.

Tell the children that they will have an opportunity, just like the adults, to fill out a commitment card on Commitment Sunday. Explain that those children who do wish to make Stewardship a way of life, and fill out a commitment card, will soon thereafter receive a box of envelopes. The envelopes will have a place for them to write down those special things they do each week in thanksgiving for everything God has given to them. Children always have time and talent to share with others as a way of thanking God, and many children have treasure to share as well from the allowance earned from chores.

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