



Stewardship Renewal Guide

The Involvement of Others

The act of helping conduct a parish stewardship effort is in itself an act of stewardship. There are many tasks that need to be performed when a stewardship effort is planned, executed and followed up. In conducting a parish effort, the parish will need the time and talents of individuals for:

- Designing artwork, social media graphics, brochures, and posters
- Printing cover letters
- Affixing labels and postage and stuffing envelopes
- Tabulating results and entering the data into the computer
- Providing Time and Talent reports of volunteers to coordinators of the parish ministries
- Telephone follow up with parishioners and ministry coordinators to assure that those who volunteer are contacted
- Reporting results to the stewardship council/committee and pastoral council

Begin building a list of people who have special talents in these areas and who can give their time when it is needed to help the parish.

When to Conduct Your Parish Stewardship Effort

There is no particular liturgical season that is more appropriate than another for doing a parish stewardship effort. However, there are two times during the year more suitable for reaching parishioners. A parish stewardship effort is best conducted in the spring months of April or May or the fall months of September or October. During other months, there may be less attendance by regular parishioners due to vacations, weekend trips, and holidays. The effort should not be conducted over weekends of important Church feast days or special liturgical celebrations. Thanksgiving weekend should also be avoided because many parishioners and their families travel out of town during these times. Generally, the best times are those when:

- No other major activity is going on in the parish, such as parish capital campaigns, the Bishop's Annual Appeal, a high school or grade school capital fund-raising campaign, a school annual fund campaign, etc.
- No special liturgies are planned such as First Communion, Confirmation, RCIA Rites, Sacramental Preparation Rites, etc.
- Schools are in session.
- The pastor, parochial vicar, and office staff are **all** available.

In addition, during the three weeks in which the effort is conducted at Masses, there should be no other major collection for the diocese especially on the weekend in which Commitment cards are being collected. In other words, the schedule must be such that for several weeks, parishioners can focus on their personal decision about Time, Talent, and Treasure.

Sequence of the Stewardship Effort

Conducting the Stewardship Effort effectively is based on organizing and implementing the procedural steps outlined here. It should not be attempted without ample planning time nor should it be shortened from three weekends to only one or two weekends. It takes several weeks of communications, homilies, and lay witness presentations to communicate what stewardship is all about. It cannot be done effectively in one or two weekends. Once the parish has begun a stewardship effort, it should be continued year-round under the leadership of the Stewardship Council/Committee.

Timetable/Checklist for Conducting a Stewardship Effort

When conducting your parish's stewardship effort, a reverse calendar will be helpful. Included in this guide is a timetable for you to use in planning your parish effort. To use the calendar, first establish the date of Stewardship Commitment Sunday, then fill in the dates working backward from there. (See the end of this guide for a sample timetable)

Preparation

A good mailing list of registered parishioners is the lifeline of any parish communications effort. Since mailings are made on a regular basis to parishioners at most parishes, it is assumed that the mailing list is relatively up-to-date. If it is not, the parish should take the time to make the parish list more accurate. In larger parishes, a roster of names and addresses will become out-of-date rapidly. In many cases, nearly 25% of the names and addresses change annually. A parish needs to have a mechanism for correcting and updating its mailing list, such as **Address Service Requested** from the U.S. Post Office which automatically forwards the mail to the new address while sending the parish the corrected address for a small charge.

While mailings will reach registered parishioners, a number of those attending the church are not registered and will be missed by the mailings made by the parish. The stewardship effort provides a wonderful opportunity to invite new parishioners to register. During the Stewardship Effort, it would be helpful to have extra brochures and commitment cards in the pews or in the back of church, and to announce from the pulpit that they are available for those who have not received a mailing at their home.

It is recommended that parishes use envelopes for their mailings rather than attempting to save money by using self-mailers. The most current research on direct mail indicates that the best response traditionally comes from a mailing that includes an outside envelope, cover letter and brochure. When addressing the envelopes, print addresses as close to the mailing date as possible so that the new parishioners who register during that period will receive the stewardship materials, and those who have moved will be deleted from the mailing.

One technique of successful direct mail is to have the mailing look as personal as possible. In fact, every element of the mail campaign should have a personalized look about it, if possible, such as:

- The address printed on the envelope rather than on labels
- The letter individually addressed with a personal salutation
- First class stamp indicating personal attention

Mailings with attention to the personal details have a higher chance of being opened and read. While it is not always possible to take all these steps, it should be understood that this is the best way to get the highest response. In some cases, the parish's mailing may be just one of 50 to 100 pieces of mail the parishioner will receive during the week, so the parish should do what it can to make sure the envelope is opened and read.

The First Week of the Effort (Weekend #1)

A letter from the pastor with accompanying brochure should be mailed to the home a few days before Weekend #1. At all Masses that weekend, the pastor delivers a short homily along with a presentation by a lay witness or couple. Depending on the tradition in your parish, this presentation takes place either prior to the start of Mass or post-Communion.

As far as parishioners are concerned, this is the first week of extensive parishioner awareness about stewardship beyond the bulletin and social media announcements. It is one of the most important weeks for the stewardship effort to date because: 1. parishioners have received a mailing at home the previous week, and 2. because this is the first time the pastor will give a homily and lay presenters will be giving their testimonies.

Generally, the parishioners' reaction will be favorable. However, some parishioners might react along these lines. "If they just wanted money from us, why didn't they just ask for it?" or "Stewardship just means they want us to tithe or give 10 percent to the Church." That is why a positive consistent message is so important.

When this message is presented in a personal way by people who have made their own commitment to this way of life, then parishioners will begin to understand that stewardship is not just a short-term effort but rather a foundation for a deepening of faith and a way of life.

Through the letters, brochures, the pastor's homilies, and presentations of the lay witnesses, the parish will begin to have a sense of the life-changing and life-enriching concept of stewardship for them as individuals and the parish as a whole.

The Second Week of the Effort (Weekend #2)

A second letter is mailed to all parishioners a few days before Weekend #2. At all Masses that weekend, the pastor delivers a short homily along with a presentation by another lay witness or couple.

This week precedes Commitment Sunday. This is an excellent weekend to host a parish picnic or fellowship event and couple it with a Ministry Fair. In addition, during this week, the communication phase of the effort continues. Parishioners are becoming more aware of what stewardship means and how it can affect their lives in a positive way. During the week, a third mailing is made to all registered parishioners. This mailing contains the important commitment cards. Announcements are made in the parish bulletin of Commitment Sunday, which is the following weekend, and parishioners are asked to return their commitment cards at all Masses.

The Third Week of the Effort (Weekend #3 – Commitment Weekend)

A third letter and commitment brochure are mailed to all parishioners a few days before weekend #3. All parishioners bring their completed cards (one for Time and Talent; the other for Treasure) to Mass on Commitment Weekend. At all Masses that weekend, the pastor delivers a stewardship homily and parishioners offer their commitment cards.

This is the week when the entire effort comes together. Parishioners are invited to make a personal commitment of giving their time, talent, and treasure in response to God's blessings in their lives. There are several ways in which the stewardship commitment cards can be presented to the parish.

Listed below are three ways to present commitment cards to the parish:

- One method is to invite parishioners to come forward at the offertory or other time during the Mass, as if they were going to receive Communion, and present their cards in the form of a gift by leaving them on the altar. This way is likely to have the strongest impact.
- Another way is for the ushers to collect the cards during a special collection.
- A third is to ask parishioners to present their cards at the same time they make their regular weekly offerings.

The rate of response will greatly increase by having extra commitment cards in the pew this weekend. Whatever method is used to present the commitment cards, it should be done in a sense of giving out of gratitude, in keeping with the spiritual meaning of stewardship.

After the cards are received, the pastor should invite those who have not signed and returned commitment cards to do so, placing them in the offertory collection the following week or mailing them to the parish office. The pastor should also remind parishioners that their commitment of time, talent, and treasure, if possible, begins right away. He should announce to the entire parish that ministry leaders will be contacting those who committed to a specific ministry as soon as the data is gathered. The pastor should also thank the parish family as a whole for their generous sharing of their time, talent, and treasure.

Elements of Communication during an initial Three-Week Stewardship Effort

Printed Stewardship Communications

There is no one best way to communicate with parishioners to ensure that the greatest number have been reached, but it is important to have a comprehensive communications effort that includes the use of a number of forms of communications.

Each of the elements of printed and digital communications should be assigned a specific role. For example, the cover letter should be used as an introduction from the pastor that describes the parish's stewardship effort and introduces more information in the accompanying brochure. The brochure should be assigned the role of explaining further the concept of stewardship. The recipient often keeps a brochure while discarding the accompanying letter, so the brochure should be as complete as possible in the event that a parishioner goes back and looks at it separately.

Letters

Letters are very effective in reaching a broad base of parishioners. They are more effective when combined with a brochure. *Samples and templates are available as resources.

Brochures

Brochures that accompany a cover letter are commonly used and effective ways of presenting the concept of stewardship. Many parishes choose to design their own. Others order educational brochures from publishing companies. The Office of Stewardship and Mission Advancement has created a Spirituality of Stewardship brochure that can be distributed to your parishioners. *Simply contact the office to obtain the file needed for professional printing.

Banners/Posters

Parishes have always used banners, posters, embroideries and drawings to communicate the message of God in a visible way in the Church. They range from montages of pictures of parishioners to poster boards created by young students to express their feelings about their faith. If it is appropriate, the parish communications plan might include banners or posters which help explain the spirituality of stewardship.

Bulletin Announcements during the Effort

During the stewardship effort, there should be regular announcements in the parish bulletin. *See the collection of additional resources for examples of announcements for use during the effort.

List of Opportunities for Time and Talent

In the early planning phase of the stewardship effort, the parish Stewardship Council/Committee should begin preparation of a list of parish activities, ministries, and community programs that provide avenues for parishioners to give of their time and talent. One way of compiling this information is to involve the leadership of the many parish groups through a written survey or a ministry leaders' retreat/meeting.

A brief description of the ministry/organization should be part of the commitment mailing. A list of the special skills that are needed by the various parish groups should also be included.

Commitment Cards and Envelopes

The commitment card is an important element of the Stewardship Effort. Parishioners are asked to complete both the Time and Talent portion and the Treasure portion of the commitment card, and put them in an envelope. The third mailing should include an envelope for the parishioners to use in turning in their cards. The portion for Time and Talent should have space for the parishioner to indicate specific ministries or areas of interest, and the Treasure portion should have a space to indicate their level of financial commitment.

When the envelopes are received, they should be opened and the cards separated by Time & Talent portion and Treasure portion—making sure that the parishioner has written his or her name on each of the cards.

Parishes are welcome to design their own cards, or utilize the cards designed by the Office of Stewardship and Mission Advancement. These can be modified, to a certain degree, to fit your parish.

Thank-You Letters

Once the commitment cards are received, all those who made a commitment should receive a thank you note from the pastor. Time and talent respondents receive an additional note from a commission chair, ministry leader, or other appropriate personnel. *Thank you templates are available.

Stewardship Presentations at Mass

During the Mass, there are a number of communication opportunities to enhance the message of stewardship. Among them are:

- **Prayers of the Faithful** - *Sample Prayers of the Faithful to be used during the two or three-week effort are included in the collection of additional resources.
- **Homilies** - The role of the spiritual leader of the parish is one of the most important elements of stewardship success. Parishioners look to the pastor and assistant pastors to help them understand stewardship and motivate them to accept stewardship as a way of giving back to God in gratitude for His gifts to us. *Examples of homilies are included in the collection of additional resources.
- **Lay Witness Presentation** - The testimony of individual parishioners or couples is an important part of the presentation of the stewardship message. The sharing by parishioners of their own faith stories and experience about their returning to God their gifts of time, talent, and treasure with the congregation is an effective way of communicating the message of stewardship. *Guidelines for the lay witness presentation and sample talks are included in the collection of additional resources.
- **Pulpit Announcements** - These are valuable reminders for those at Mass about key steps in the Stewardship Effort. *Examples are available within the collection of additional resources.

After Commitment Weekend

Parish Evaluation

The effectiveness of the Stewardship Effort cannot be judged on the basis of financial results and volunteer commitments only. Because it is spiritually based, the results will be in the hearts of those who have responded to the stewardship message. While it is difficult to see the evidence in quantitative terms, we can see it in qualitative terms. E.g., more enthusiasm, increased joy, deeper individual commitment, a different outlook, and increased attendance at Mass and special liturgies. Often times, seeds are planted, but it takes years for the roots to form and go strong. Keep planting the seeds.

Commitments of time, talent, and treasure, on the other hand, *can* be measured. Offertory giving should be analyzed by looking at comparable periods in previous years, particularly of the year prior to the stewardship effort. Review of the numbers should include factoring in or out special situations such as one year having a month with five Sundays and another comparable period with four Sundays. The results should also compare the number of volunteers participating from year to year, if the data is available.

It is important that several members of the parish leadership meet with the pastor and associate pastors to formally evaluate the results of the Stewardship Effort. This should include the chairpersons of the Stewardship Council/Committee, Finance Council, and Parish Pastoral Council.

Follow-Up on Commitments

One of the most critical roles, and yet one that is neglected so often, is adequate follow-up. It is important that a follow-up effort start with those who have already made commitments.

The first step is to separate the Time and Talent commitment cards from the Treasure cards.

The Treasure cards should be turned over to the appropriate person, as designated by the pastor - the Finance Council chair, the parish bookkeeper, or the staff member who is responsible for recording parishioner contributions. The Time and Talent information should be entered into a database, and a report of all new and continuing volunteers should be given to the appropriate ministry leaders.

Time and Talent Commitment Follow-Up

The information collected on the Time and Talent commitment cards from the parishioners should be disseminated as quickly as possible to the various parish commissions and groups that match up with the talents of the parishioners. The most efficient way of compiling the information is through use of a computer database. Many parishes find the "Family Screen" on Parish Data Systems (PDS) to be a good place to input the ministry information. Other parishes use a simple Access database. Smaller parishes may put the information into a table, or simply make enough copies of the time and talent cards to share that information with the ministry leaders. As soon as the ministry leaders receive their list of new and continuing volunteers, they should contact the parishioners, thank them for their stewardship gift of time, and invite them to the next meeting of the ministry. *See the collection of resources for sample letters.

The Stewardship Council/Committee should follow up with the ministry leaders to assure that parishioners who have made time and talent commitments have been contacted. Individuals who have volunteered but have not yet gotten involved should be contacted. One of the worst things we can do as a Church is invite people to be involved, and then not follow-up with their openness and willingness to be an engaged parishioner.

Treasure Commitment Follow-Up

A summary of the commitments should be prepared for the Stewardship Council/Committee and Finance Council as an indication of the level of commitment being made to the finances of the parish. It is important to note that returned cards will not indicate the total income to be expected. ***The Finance Council cannot use the totals from treasure commitment cards in preparing the church budget.*** For the individual, signing a treasure commitment card is a reminder of the spiritual commitment to give back out of gratitude.

When the thank-you note is sent, it should include a reference to the amount (or percentage) of giving by the parishioner. The amount can be presented on a weekly, monthly, and annual basis, depending on how they have stated it on their treasure commitment card. One of the purposes of the note is to acknowledge the gift and make sure the amount (or percentage) is correct. *See the collection of resources for a sample thank you letter

Follow-Up with Those Who Have Not Committed

Non-Respondents and New Parishioners

The Stewardship Effort is never really over during the year because the parish is a dynamic, growing organization. It is necessary to follow-up with those who have not responded, as well as those who join the parish during the year.

It is important to make contact with parishioners who have not responded. A comparison of those who did respond with the total parish roster will identify the non-respondents. Then, they need to be separated for follow-up mailings as well as telephone contacts.

New parishioners represent a significant opportunity for adding many gifts of time, talent, and treasure to the parish. And yet, because they are not members of the parish during the stewardship effort, they tend to be neglected. Someone on the Stewardship Council/Committee or Pastoral Council should be assigned the responsibility of contacting these individuals, as part of a welcoming committee, including making a presentation on stewardship and presenting commitment cards to them. Often, these individuals bring a new source of energy and leadership to parish life.

These methods of presenting stewardship to new parishioners will depend on the traditional way the parish welcomes them. It may be best to make stewardship materials part of a welcoming kit that is presented to new parishioners, to pass it out when the parishioner comes to the church office to register, or to hand it out at the parish's monthly reception of newcomers.

Timetable for Conducting an Initial Stewardship Effort

To use the following calendar, first establish the date of your Stewardship Commitment Sunday, then fill in the dates working backwards from there. On this calendar, the “X” represents Commitment Sunday. For example, the designation “X-10” in the calendar signifies *10 weeks before Commitment Sunday*.

X-10	Week of:	Pastor and stewardship committee begin recruiting lay witnesses or couples to speak at all Masses on Weekend 1 and Weekend 2. If the parish is not able to recruit volunteers from the parish, the diocese will help find lay witnesses from other parishes. Generally speaking, it is much more effective to use individuals from your own parish.
X-9	Week of:	Mailings to parishioners are planned and scheduled beginning this week. Brochures are either designed by the stewardship committee or ordered from a company that publishes stewardship resources. The Office of Development has a number of brochure templates in Microsoft Publisher that can be personalized for your parish.
X-8	Week of:	Envelopes and letterhead for cover letters are ordered from local printer. Lists of time and talent opportunities are finalized. Time and Talent Brochures and commitment cards are created and sent to printer.
X-7	Week of:	If parish has a newsletter, article about stewardship is written and included in the next issue.
X-6	Week of:	Special activities, such as making posters or banners, are planned and assigned.
X-5	Week of:	First bulletin announcement is placed in church bulletin. Labels for four full parish mailings are ordered.
X-4	Week of:	Lay witnesses meet with pastor to coordinate their remarks. Second bulletin announcement is placed in church bulletin.
X-3	Week of:	Mailing #1 is made to all parishioners following this weekend. Third bulletin announcement is placed in church bulletin.
X-2	Week of:	WEEKEND #1. Pastor’s homily #1. First lay witness presentation. Mailing #2 is sent to all parishioners after Weekend #1. The fourth bulletin announcement is placed in church bulletin.
X-1	Week of:	WEEKEND #2. Pastor’s homily #2. Second lay witness presentation. Mailing #3 is made to all parishioners after Weekend #2. The fifth bulletin announcement is placed in church bulletin, announcing that commitment cards will be mailed to homes during the week and they are to be returned to church the following weekend. <i>*because this week precedes Commitment Sunday, it’s an excellent weekend to host a parish picnic or fellowship event and couple it with a Ministry Fair</i>
X	Week of:	WEEKEND #3. – COMMITMENT WEEKEND. Pastor’s homily #3. Cards are presented and collected at Mass. Sixth bulletin announcement is placed in church bulletin.
X+1	Week of:	Commitment card information entered into the database and a thank-you mailing is made to those parishioners who have responded with time, talent and treasure commitment cards.
X+2	Week of:	Ministry leaders should receive a list of names and contact information. All those who make a commitment should be contacted within one month of Commitment Sunday.

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FIRST TIME ANNUAL STEWARDSHIP EFFORT

Cover Letter for First Total Parish Mailing

[Date]

Dear [salutation]:

Spiritual growth and renewal are a continuing part of the life of every Christian. They are also vital to the life of our parish. An important aspect of this spiritual growth is embodied in the principle of stewardship. Through stewardship, we thank God for all His blessings by returning to Him a portion of the time, talent, and treasure He has freely given to us.

During the next few weeks, you will be hearing more about stewardship and what it means as a spirituality. You will be asked to reflect on three areas of stewardship and how they are lived out in your life. Among the important questions are:

- How much **TIME** do you set aside each week in prayer and involvement in volunteer activities in your parish and in our community?
- How you are using your **TALENTS** for the betterment of our parish family and for the community as a whole?
- What percentage of your yearly income (**TREASURE**) do you presently give to support your church and community activities?

This weekend at all Masses, you will be hearing from me and from [name/names of lay witnesses] who will talk about their personal experiences with stewardship as a way of life. During the next several weeks, I suggest that you and members of your household spend time in prayerful thought about the spirituality of stewardship and your relationship with the Lord. The enclosed brochure will help you understand the true meaning of stewardship. Please take the time to read it prayerfully.

Finally, I would like to invite you to attend our parish Ministry Fair next weekend. We will be hosting a parish [picnic, cookout, coffee and donuts] to bring parishioners together for fellowship. This will be an opportunity to connect to one another, as well as to our parish family and ministries. During this next week, please prayerfully consider how you might take another step in engaging in your faith community.

Sincerely yours in Christ,

Pastor's Signature

[Pastor's Name]

FIRST TIME ANNUAL STEWARDSHIP EFFORT

Cover Letter for Second Total Parish Mailing

[Date]

Dear [salutation],

“Give and it shall be given to you... For the measure
you measure with will be measured back to you”

- Luke 6: 38

In the letter and brochure you received last week, I asked you to reflect on the many blessings you have received and consider this as a time for personal renewal in your relationship with the Lord. I asked you to think about stewardship of time, talent, and treasure and how you and/or your family might make a new commitment to giving.

Your Time - For many of us, time is our most precious commodity. The demands of work, school, community, parish, and family are overwhelming at times. Occasionally, when we feel out of control, we must get off the merry-go-round and rethink what life is all about. We must seek to balance our time against what we know we must do. I would hope that you consider reexamining your priorities to give more of your time to our parish and the larger community.

Your Talent - Everyone of us is talented in some way. It may be in music, art, writing, organizing, planning, driving a car, supervising a project, and even making other people laugh. Our parish provides each and every one of you with an opportunity to use the specific talents you have been given. I hope you will consider committing a greater share of your talents to our parish and community.

Your Treasure - Your financial support is a major reason why we are able to continue to provide our religious, educational, and social ministries. The primary source of our parish’s financial support is the weekly offertory collection. Stewardship of treasure involves committing an intentional and regular portion of our income to our church and our community. I hope you will consider committing a proportionate and sacrificial percentage of your annual income to our parish.

This weekend at all Masses, you will hear from me and from [name/names of lay witnesses] who will talk about their personal experiences with stewardship as a way of life. Next week, I will ask you to make your commitment of your time, talent, and treasure to your parish. Then, all of us will be asked to offer our commitment cards to the Lord at the altar [or in the offertory collection]. It will be an impactful day for all of us in the parish as we continue to build a community of faith and family.

Sincerely yours in Christ,

Pastor’s Signature

[Pastor’s Name]

FIRST TIME ANNUAL STEWARDSHIP EFFORT

Cover Letter for Third Total Parish Mailing

[Date]

Dear [salutation],

For the past several weeks, we have been asking you to take to prayer the humble request to make a commitment to the parish based on what the Lord has given you. Now, we are asking you to acknowledge your commitment of TIME, TALENT, and TREASURE in a more formal way.

I am asking you to:

1. Study the Stewardship Opportunities for Time and Talent sheet included. Select those best suited to you and write them (or place a check by them) on the Time and Talent card. If you are already committing your Time and Talent, please include your current parish involvement.
2. Complete the Stewardship of Treasure card included in the brochure. Consider a percentage of your annual income as your level of giving. The financial commitment between you and the parish is a confidential matter.
3. Use the envelope that is included to return both your Time and Talent commitment card and Treasure commitment card. Bring the envelope with you to Mass this weekend.

Please be generous with your time, talent, and treasure commitments. As more members of our parish family take personal steps in embracing stewardship as a way of life, our parish will continue to grow and thrive. We need your commitment to continue building a community of faith.

Please be assured that you and your loved ones are in my daily prayer.

Sincerely yours in Christ,

Pastor's Signature

[Pastor's Name]

ANNUAL RENEWAL OF STEWARDSHIP EFFORT

Sample Letter to go with 1st Renewal Mailing (with Stewardship brochure)

[Date]

Dear [salutation],

Again this year, those of us here at [parish name] will have an opportunity to renew our commitment to living the life of good and faithful stewardship. As we reflect on the many blessings in our lives, we prayerfully ask if our corresponding gifts back to the Lord are in proportion to what we have been given.

Many members of our parish family are making a most generous response and can attest to the sense of peace and the deepening of faith that they have experienced. I am confident that many others would like to respond more fully, but don't know where they will find more time or more money to give.

I'd like to invite you to take another step. If you find that you are presently sharing two hours of your time each week on a volunteer basis, could you take another step and share three? If you are currently giving one or two percent of your income to the church, could you take another step and increase it to two or three percent?

We have all been blessed in many and various ways and have a basic need to give thanks. Will you take another step in gratitude to God for what you have been given? He has promised that He will not be outdone in generosity.

I would like to invite you to attend our parish Ministry Fair next weekend. We will be hosting a parish [picnic, cookout, coffee and donuts] to bring parishioners together for fellowship. This will be an opportunity to connect to one another, as well as to our parish family and ministries. During this next week, please prayerfully consider how you might take another step in engaging in your faith community.

My thanks to each of you for all you have done in the past, and for your continuing generosity of time, talent, and treasure.

Sincerely yours in Christ,

Pastor's Signature

[Pastor Name]

ANNUAL RENEWAL OF STEWARDSHIP EFFORT

Sample Letter to Go With 2nd Renewal Mailing (with commitment brochure)

[Date]

Dear [salutation],

Over the past week, I hope you have taken some time to look over the brochure, the self-assessment, and the giving guide worksheet and prayerfully considered your commitment for the coming year.

Each of us is blessed in different ways. We are asked to look at our blessings, our talents, our monetary resources and see if what we are returning to the Lord is proportionate to what He has given to us. It is a very individual decision to be made by each person or family.

Please fill out the Time and Talent portion of the enclosed commitment card. Indicate those current ministries you wish to continue and any new ones you would like to begin for the coming year. Remember, also, that your community involvement is also part of your time and talent even though it is not on the commitment card.

As you complete the Stewardship of Treasure included with the brochure, please consider taking another step in the level of your gift. Bring both your Time & Talent and your Treasure commitment card with you to Mass this coming weekend or bring them by the church office.

I am touched by the past generosity of all of our parishioners, and I am confident of your continued commitment to stewardship of time, talent, and treasure.

Sincerely yours in Christ,

Pastor's Signature

[Pastor Name]

Suggested Bulletin Announcements during the Stewardship Effort

First Bulletin Announcement: Five weeks before Commitment Sunday

Our Parish will begin a Stewardship Effort on (date). Stewardship is based on the spiritual principles of the Old Testament and the teachings of Jesus. It is a way of thanking God for all the blessings He has given us by returning to Him a portion of time, talent, and treasure. Stewardship can change the spiritual lives of both individuals and the parish as a whole.

Second Bulletin Announcement: Four weeks before Commitment Sunday

Stewardship is based on our need to give back to God out of gratitude, not on the Church's need to receive. It is based on the premise that all that we have and all that we are comes from God and, as a way of thanking Him for all our blessings, we return a portion of the time, talent, and treasure He has allotted to us. Soon, we will begin a Stewardship Effort at our parish. Please be generous in giving of yourself.

Third Bulletin Announcement: Three weeks before Commitment Sunday

Christian stewardship provides spirituality that you can take home from church, exercise at work, and express through personal involvement in the community and parish. Please pray that our stewardship effort, which begins next weekend, will enlighten our entire parish. At all Masses next weekend, we will be hearing from parishioners [*name*] who will describe how stewardship affects their lives.

Fourth Bulletin Announcement: Two weeks before Commitment Sunday

Our Stewardship Effort begins this weekend. At all Masses this weekend, you heard from me and from our parishioners, [*names*], about their personal experiences with stewardship. Next weekend, you will hear from [*name parishioners*]. Please continue to give prayerful thought to your commitment of time, talent, and treasure to the parish and the community.

Fifth Bulletin Announcement: One week before Commitment Sunday

We continue our Stewardship Effort. Where stewardship has been implemented, it has changed the lives of both givers and receivers. At all Masses this weekend, you heard from me and from our parishioners (*name*) about their personal experiences with stewardship. You will receive a commitment card in the mail later this week asking you to make your stewardship commitment of time, talent, and treasure.

Sixth Bulletin Announcement: Commitment Sunday

This is Stewardship Commitment Sunday. Please return your time, talent, and treasure cards at Mass today. If you did not bring them to Mass today, please bring them next week or mail them to the church this week.

Sample Prayers of the Faithful for Stewardship

Prayers of the Faithful help remind us of our faith and our values. The following may be used written or adapted to better fit the needs of the parish.

- ◆ O, God, our loving Creator and Giver of all good gifts, bless our parish, strengthen our faith and grant us the spirit of Christian stewardship so that we may give generously of our time, talent and treasure to spread Your kingdom here in our church and throughout the world. For this, we pray to the Lord...
- ◆ Lord, God, Creator of the universe, we thank you for the gifts, talents and abilities You have given to each of us. These are represented by the treasure we are about to collect and offer at the altar, and by the personal commitments of time and talent that are being made. May these gifts enable us more effectively to carry out the mission of the parish and the mission of the church in the world. For this, we pray to the Lord...
- ◆ All that we are, all that we have, and all that we will become is a gift from God. May Christians everywhere recognize the need to respond with gratitude to God's many gifts. For this we pray to the Lord...
- ◆ God created the world and everything in it. As stewards of this world, may we work toward a deep appreciation of all creation, respect for all human life, preservation of the environment, and development of this world through noble human effort, we pray to the Lord...
- ◆ God calls each of us—clergy, religious, lay person; married, single; adult, child—to play a unique role in carrying out the divine plan. In answering that call, may Christians everywhere become good stewards of their personal, God-given vocation, we pray to the Lord...
- ◆ For all Catholics, who give generous support through time, talent and treasure to parish and diocesan programs and to the universal Church, in thanksgiving we pray to the Lord...
- ◆ Many caring stewards here in our parish give generously of their time, talent and treasure in response to God's gifts. With gratitude for their stewardship, we pray to the Lord...

Suggested Pulpit Announcements

During the Stewardship Effort, the following pulpit announcements about stewardship can be made.

Two Weeks before Commitment Sunday:

You should have received a mailing from the pastor this week. During the next few weeks, you will be asked to look at your giving of time, talent, and treasure. You will be asked to make a commitment of your time and specific talents to our parish. You will also be asked to decide the portion of your income you plan to give as a sign of gratitude to God for what you have been given and as a way of expressing your faith and trust in God. Please give prayerful consideration to your response.

One Week before Commitment Sunday:

As you are aware, our parish is in the midst of a stewardship effort. During the past week you will receive a letter from Father along with a commitment card for your giving of time, talent, and treasure. Please spend some time this week prayerfully considering your response. Next weekend you will be asked to make a commitment of your time, talent, and treasure to our parish.

Commitment Sunday:

Over the last few weeks, we have asked you to give prayerful thought to your commitment of time, talent, and treasure. Today is Commitment Sunday and today during Mass we will be asking the ushers to come forward and collect our commitment cards. (If the parish decides to have parishioners come to the altar with their commitment cards, explain this method – **please note that this method is much more impactful*).

Sample Homily #1 for the Total Stewardship Effort

The following presentation serves as an example.

In the first letter of St. Peter, he reminds us, “As each one has received a gift, use it to serve one another as good stewards of God’s varied grace.” Throughout Holy Scripture, there are constant reminders that we are called to be stewards of all of God’s gifts... Our time, our talents, our financial resources, our communities, the earth we live on with its natural resources, and our relationships with family and all those around us. We must truly recognize that everything belongs to God, and we are stewards or caretakers who are expected to use the gifts in service to one another. Simply put, stewardship is about how we use those gifts.

Today, we are beginning a stewardship effort here at our parish. It is an important and significant event in our parish life. It is one that will change the lives of each of us and which will change the life of our parish.

At the end of the three-week stewardship effort, you will be asked to make a specific commitment to our parish of your time, your talent, and your treasure. We ask for your commitment in writing for each of these important elements of stewardship. And, we will ask you to return your commitment cards on Commitment Sunday.

In the meanwhile, you will hear from (or have heard from) two of our parishioners about how stewardship affects their lives. This week, I am happy to announce that you will hear from (or have heard from)* (name of presenter). And next week our presenter will be (name). We thank both of these parishioners for their act of stewardship in standing before our parish and sharing with us how stewardship is affecting their lives. **(The Lay Witness presentation may be done either before the processional at the beginning of Mass or after Communion.)*

We greatly appreciate their willingness to come forward and explain stewardship because, for many Catholics, it is a misunderstood concept. This is one of the reasons why you received a mailing this week and will be receiving two more over the next two weeks. Please read the letters and brochures when they arrive at your home.

Stewardship is based on the spiritual principles of the Old Testament and the teachings of Christ. Stewardship is a way of life. It is a way of thanking God for all His blessings by returning a portion of the Time, Talent, and Treasure allotted to us.

We are asking all of you to spend the next two weeks praying and thinking about the true meaning of stewardship and how it can impact your life. For individuals, it means thinking about stewardship and the commitments we make. For others, it means having a discussion with family members about the family’s total stewardship commitment. In either case, we are asked to look at stewardship as the joyful return to God of the first fruits of what He has bestowed upon us.

In Stewardship of Time and Talent, we are called on to give of ourselves and our time to the church and to our community. In Stewardship of Treasure, we give back to God by giving of our financial resources to our Church, to the diocese, and to charitable organizations in the community. We look to Jesus for help in understanding what stewardship is and what it means.

Jesus points out that we reveal our values by our actions just as a tree reveals what kind of tree it is by the kind of fruit it bears. This is very similar to what Our Lord says in the Gospel of St. Luke about the things we value, “Where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.”

Stewardship will make a difference. The difference is seen in several areas of our lives. First, the difference is in the focus of giving. Instead of focusing on the needs of the group to whom we’re giving financial support or helping with time and talent, the focus is primarily on God and our relationship with Him.

Second, the difference is in the motivation for giving. Stewardship is an integral part of our spiritual life and we give because we are grateful to God for what He has given us. We give freely because we want to, not because we have to.

Third, the difference is in the result of the giving. As we practice stewardship, we find we grow spiritually and that our faith is deepened and nourished. In fact, we find that our lives are changed for the good.

Please take the next two weeks to read the letters and brochures we are sending you and to listen carefully to what your fellow parishioners have to say about their commitments from the pulpit. Then, I hope you will give prayerful consideration to your personal commitment of your time, talent, and treasure.

Sample Homily #2 for the Total Stewardship Effort

The following presentation serves as an example.

“For we brought nothing into the world, just as we shall not be able to take anything out of it.”
I Timothy 6:17-19

This passage is one of many in Scripture which helps us understand and become aware of what the concept of stewardship is all about, and how, by discovering its true meaning, we will undergo a personal transformation. We are reminded that all of the “things” of this world are gifts from God, and should be used to bring us closer to God—the end for which we are created. Have you ever seen a U-Haul following a hearse?

Contrary to what many people feel or assume, stewardship is not a hidden term for fund-raising. It is a powerful concept that will change our faith life and the faith life of our parish. For stewardship is a way of life. It is based on the biblical view of God as Creator and us as His servants. We are accountable to Him for the use of our gifts of time, talent, and treasure that He gives us during our life on earth.

Stewardship means that we are not owners of all that we have on earth but we are only stewards of our time, our talent, and our treasure. Stewardship provides us with the foundation for a deepened faith, for all of us, and our parish. Stewardship begins with an awakening of the need that we have that no one can dispute, because it is universal and ever-present. It is the personal need of each one of us to return to the Lord, a portion of the gifts He has given us of time, talent, and treasure in gratitude for what He has done for us.

Stewardship is the giving of the “first fruits” of what we have received, not the portion of the gift that is left over. You will find when you decide to give to God the first portion of your time, talent, and treasure that what, at first, seemed difficult soon becomes easy for us to do. What we have left over is often more than enough for our own needs. Putting God first in our lives by practicing stewardship deepens our faith in a way that we never dreamed possible.

As you are aware, we are conducting a stewardship effort at our parish, and I hope you are giving prayerful consideration to how you might commit your time, talent, and your treasure to our parish. This coming week you will receive the third and final mailing of our stewardship information. And, we will ask you to consider making a covenant of stewardship. By committing yourself to be a wise and prudent steward of your time, talent, and treasure, you will enhance and enrich the quality of your personal faith, as well as the faith of this parish community.

Let us prayerfully reflect on the power of stewardship and let this spirituality transform our hearts so that we may live a life of greater fulfillment and peace.

And, let us use the opportunity we have today of listening to one of our parishioners who has found the personal value of stewardship. Today, we will be hearing from (or have heard from)* (names of parishioners). **(The Lay Witness presentation may be done either before the processional at the beginning of Mass or after Communion.)*

Sample Homily #3 for the Total Stewardship Effort

The following presentation serves as an example.

“Each must do as already determined, without sadness or compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.” These words of St. Paul to the Corinthians remind us that our giving ought to be planned and determined in a prayerful way... Welcome to Commitment Sunday. Our three week stewardship effort concludes in our parish today. We have all spent some time over the last several weeks reading about stewardship, studying how it changes our lives, and giving consideration to our responsibility to share our gifts with our parish.

We have heard from our fellow parishioners about what stewardship means to them, and how they live their lives based on stewardship.

Later in the Mass today, we will be presenting our stewardship gifts. The ushers will come forward and collect our Time and Talent, and Treasure commitment cards (*or -You will be asked to bring your commitment cards forward to the altar and place them in the stewardship basket*). Our parish thanks all of you for your commitment of time, talent, and treasure.

Just a reminder: If you have not brought your cards with you today, please do so next Sunday. (*Or-There are additional commitment cards in the pew for those who forgot to bring theirs today*)

Stewardship, as we have learned, is based on the spiritual principles of the Old Testament and the teachings of Jesus. We have learned that those who have adopted stewardship have seen their lives transform.

We have also learned that stewardship is a way of life. It is a way of thanking God for all His blessings by our returning a portion of the time, talent, and treasure given to us. Stewardship deepens our relationship with the Lord and brings each of us a sense of peace and joy. Jesus promises us that by practicing stewardship, we will grow spiritually. There are many references in the Bible to stewardship. In one of those, Jesus tells us, “You can be sure that whoever gives even a drink of cold water to one of the least of my followers, will certainly receive a reward” (Matthew 10:37-42). That reward also involves a growing trust in God’s divine will. Symbolically, we give a drink of cold water when we make our time, talents, and treasure available to our parish and to community. Every parishioner is called to give a drink of cold water by supporting the parish as it brings Christ’s healing touch to our faith community and to those it serves.

Our parish family is blessed with many different members, each of whom has special talents and abilities that can benefit our parish family. Today, we bring forth our gifts in God’s name. I hope that you as individuals, and we as a parish, will grow spiritually because of committing to give of our stewardship gifts.

Thank you.

Sample Thank-You Letter to Parishioners

[Date]

Dear [salutation]:

I am most grateful for your generous response to our first parish stewardship effort. I thank you and am confident that the benefits of embracing a stewardship way of life will be a source of blessing for you. More than [number] households responded with commitment cards. While this is an excellent response for a first-time effort, we will be contacting those who have not yet returned their commitment card.

It has been encouraging to see the number of people who responded to our Time and Talent opportunities. Your name and contact information has been given to the coordinators of ministries you selected. You will be contacted soon and given the opportunity to become involved in your chosen ministry. If you are not contacted, please let me know!

In addition to your generosity of time and talent, you have responded that you will contribute \$ _____ (or ____%) of your income for the year. This indicates your strong financial commitment to our parish, and it helps me and our Finance Council make responsible budget decisions for our parish. I am confident that you will honor your financial commitment.*

Again, thank you for your response to our Stewardship Effort. You have been a great help to me. And, I hope it has helped you in giving thanks for what you have been given by sharing with others.

Sincerely yours in Christ,

Pastor's Signature

[Pastor's Name]

****Note: If a parishioner responds to time and talent only, eliminate paragraph three in the above letter.***

Letter to Those Who Have Not Responded

[Date]

Dear [salutation],

The response to our Stewardship Effort has been very encouraging. More than _____ individuals and families have responded and committed their gifts of time, talent and treasure.

I am most grateful to all those who have made their commitment, but our parish family will have even greater cause to rejoice if more of our households participate in the stewardship effort. If you have not received, or perhaps have misplaced, your stewardship commitment cards, the parish office would be most happy to provide you with another.

If you still have your stewardship materials and are now in a better position to make a Time, Talent and Treasure commitment, but thought it might be too late - it is not too late! Please spend some time in a prayer of gratitude for God's gifts in your life. I encourage you to sign the Stewardship Covenant and make your commitment of time, talent, and treasure. You can mail or take your stewardship cards to the office today, or drop them in the offertory collection at any Mass. Thank you for your commitment to our parish family and the community.

Sincerely yours in Christ,

Pastor's Signature

[Pastor's Name]

Stewardship Telephone Follow-Up

The following is a suggested approach to your telephone calls to parishioners who have not responded. Use it as a guideline in developing your parish's approach.

Talk to the person(s) whose name is on the list, not to another member of the family. If they are not home, ask for a time when you can reach them. Leave a message that you are a fellow parishioner who is calling on behalf of the parish.

The purpose of the call is to follow up on the homilies and mailings and get the person to respond to the request for their time, talent, and treasure commitment. Most of the calls will be very positive. Not all parishioners will respond the same way and, regrettably, a few will be negative.

Your responsibility is to talk to them about the stewardship effort, listen to what they say, give them enough opportunity to state their feelings and then ask them if they will give special consideration and respond to the cards they have received in the mail. Signing the cards is an outward sign of making a commitment. No one will call them to task if they fail to live up to their commitment. Conditions may change, causing them to be unable to fulfill their commitment.

Please make sure that parishioners know we appreciate the contribution of time, talent, and treasure they make to the parish. They may respond that they are already doing as much as they can. We would like them to list those current involvements on their cards. The issue here is for everyone to think about their blessings from God and take a fresh look at their time, talent and treasure contributions. They may decide there is no need to change their existing level of contributions and, of course, that is perfectly all right with us.

A suggested approach to the telephone calls:

"Hello, Mr., Mrs. or Ms. _____. My name is _____. I am a member of the parish and I have donated some of my time to the stewardship effort. How are you tonight? Fr. _____ asked me to call you to see if you have received the mailings from the parish in the last couple of weeks about stewardship. Have you received the mailings? The most recent one was sent with a letter and a brochure with response cards.

IF "YES" ...Have you had a chance to read them?

IF "YES" ...I hope you will be responding to Fr. _____'s request for your commitment. The cards can be brought to Mass this weekend. [If they are undecided, try to get them to respond and complete the cards.]

IF "NO" ...I encourage you to read it and consider making a commitment to the parish. Thank you.

IF "NO" OR "NOT SURE" ...Let me give you an idea of what it is all about with the hope that you will respond to it. For the last several weeks, the parish has been conducting a Stewardship Effort. Mailings that went out the last couple of weeks were asking all of us to make a renewed commitment of the time we have to work for the parish. It is also asked us to commit our talents to the parish. And, finally, it asked us to make a commitment to the financial support of the parish through the weekly offertory collection. We are inviting parishioners to fill out the Time and Talent card and a Treasure card for the weekly offertory collection. I hope that you will respond by completing the cards and bringing them with you to Mass this weekend. If you would like us to send another card, we will do so.

Sample Communications Commission Letter to Time and Talent Respondents

EXAMPLE for Communications Commission

****Please adjust to fit specific ministries****

[Date]

Dear [Name]:

Thank you for responding to our parish's call for stewards. I was asked to join the Communications Commission just over a year ago, and from my experience, I must admit that I always seem to get more out of stewardship than I give. And, I haven't found a more friendly, helpful, and appreciative group than the parishioners and staff of our parish.

Through advertisements, bulletins, inserts, social media, newsletters, mailings, articles, and posters of information to the parish and community about the people and events of our parish. Our accomplishments over the past year include the publishing of the parish news, a directory of parish ministries and organizations, and increasing our presence on social media.

Our needs in communications involve many talents and tasks. Your response to the stewardship effort indicated an interest in some of the areas. The questionnaire enclosed is intended to get a better idea as to what specific areas you feel you can best contribute, and the level of involvement with which you feel comfortable.

Please fill out the form as completely as possible and return it in the envelope this week.

And thank you again. Call me at [Phone Number] if you have any questions.

Many Blessings,

Chairperson's Signature

[Chairperson's Name]

Lay Witness Guide

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 or at the end of Mass 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

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, talents, 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 your time and talent? Were you able to give 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 God has given to them and make a generous response to His many gifts.

Tips for Presenting a Lay Witness Talk

An important part of a person’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 of key words to guide you through your presentation so that it is more natural. But do not hesitate to read it if that makes you more comfortable.

- For you to give a good presentation, it is best for you to rehearse your talk aloud. If you just practice reading it silently, it won't have the same effect. If it is possible, practice in the church when no one is there, using the sound system. It is also recommended that you practice in front of a friend or family member, even if it's a little bit awkward.
- 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.
- 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.
- 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'ts 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 our own 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 and share of time, talent, and treasure as a way of expressing their gratitude and trust in God.
- 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 give 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 other 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. Peter’s, along with our three children, Matthew, Mark, and Luke. 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

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 an 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, and 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 #3

If I had to choose one word to describe stewardship, that word would be 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 onetime 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. 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 Kathy, and I have been a member of this parish for 11 years. I am married to my husband, Bill. We have three children — Patrick, Michael, and Luke. 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, which 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 and 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.

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 me 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, and 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 seconds 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."

To summarize: 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 the “What’s 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...”

“I am too old...” - Ann was an RCIA sponsor at 94 years old and continued to lector until she was 95.

“I am too young...” - 14 year old Sean 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.

“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 a while.

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?

Tips for Running a Ministry Fair

Goal: *The purpose of a Ministry Fair is to augment the stewardship effort by increasing levels of participation, involvement, and awareness of ministries within the parish community.*

The Ministry Fair is Multi-Purposed:

- ◆ A celebration of the work of the Church
- ◆ A *thank you* to all those who carry out the mission of the parish
- ◆ A time to highlight the services available within the parish
- ◆ An occasion for those already involved to develop a greater sense of who they are and what their mission is.

A ministry extravaganza is an event in which all ministries, programs, and services are showcased at one time – each having its own table, booth, or space. This is an occasion in which all parishioners are able to meet people and gather information about the various ministries within the parish. This event allows parishioners to ask questions and also brings them to a greater awareness of all the opportunities the parish has to offer.

When:

After all Masses during a weekend in the Social Hall or outside under tents, with food and beverage. You may want to consider a parish picnic, cookout, or coffee and donuts. It is important to have events that will capture the attention of children and offer multiple reasons for adults to linger.

Hosting a Ministry Fair requires much time and preparation. Take the time to plan your fair well and start early. Developing teams of people who are responsible for specific aspects of the Fair can lighten the workload for you, the parish staff, and the Stewardship Council. Also, the more people involved in the event fosters a stronger sense of ownership and contributes to its success.

The following are a list of teams that can aid with you in these efforts:

- In consultation with the pastoral leadership, plan a date and reserve a site (usually the Social Hall). If outside, please make rain contingencies.
- Establish a budget. Again, working with your pastoral leaders.
- Mark the weekends (3) on the parish calendar and gather a team to coordinate the project. The first weekend should be lay witness talks. The following weekend is for the ministry fair. The last weekend is for the parishioners to have the opportunity to turn in their commitment cards during Mass.
- Determine which ministries or individuals should provide lay witness talks.
- Contact all organizations/ministries/programs/activities by a letter to invite to participate in the Ministry Fair. Be careful not to exclude anyone, even a group that may do something only once a year. If you want the ministry to provide a lay witness talk, please

extend the invitation in the letter. If the organization chooses not to participate in the fair, request that they still turn in the Ministry Descriptions Form or request an updated description to include in the brochure. Give deadlines to RSVP for participation and for their updated information to be returned to the Stewardship Council.

- Begin to develop a brochure outlining ministries, descriptions, and contact names.
- Plan layout configurations for all participating parish groups.
- Make sure that every table/booth has someone available at all times during the fair in order to answer questions. Please make this expectation clear in your invitation letter.

Planning Teams:

Communications/Public Relations:

- Prepare to mail a letter from the pastor, inviting all members of the parish to attend.
- Prepare (or utilize provided) bulletin announcements, and give to parish secretary.
- Post information on the parish website and social media platforms.
- Design signs/posters for parish and local community to advertise.
- Design special flyers to school, religious education classes, and other organizations.

Set Up/Decorations:

- Signs for all organizations.
- Tables - does the parish have enough or do you need to borrow/rent?
- Tables cloths and/or banners.
- Balloons.
- Name Tags.

Two/Three Weeks before the Ministry Fair:

- Bulletin Announcements
- Email blast or include in eNewsletter
- Ensure info is on the website and social media

The Week before the Ministry Fair:

- Parish brochures/booklets are distributed.
- Use one or a combination of homily, lay witness talks to promote time and talent opportunities in the parish.

The Day of the Ministry Fair:

- Pastors/pastoral administrators should make announcements at all of the Masses.
- The day before or that Saturday, organize tables, signs, and set-up for food/beverage.
- Have a sign-in sheet with names, phone numbers, and email addresses for all parishioners who attend the fair.

- Have the team to help with the clean-up of the hall/site. This is also a great time to tap into confirmation students who are completing service hours.

Ministry Commitment Sunday (the weekend after the fair):

- Collect Ministry Commitments before and after Masses. Encourage parishioners who have not yet decided to bring commitment cards to the parish office within the next week.
- Priests/pastoral administrators should thank all parishioners who have decided to become more actively involved in parish life.

Follow-Up:

- ***It is critical to have an acknowledgement process ready to take effect once the information is collected.*** One suggestion is to have the Stewardship Council send an acknowledgement/thank you note, telling them that they will be notified by a specific date from the ministry chair. The parishioner is to be encouraged to contact the Stewardship Council (provide contact information) if they have NOT heard from the ministry chair by that date. This allows a good follow-up plan to be implemented and centralized, and reduces the frustration of people who sign up and then feel ignored.
- Make a listing available of all new volunteers to all ministries.

Additional Ideas:

- Have a picture collage of ministries.
- Have a contest between the ministries for the best or most creative display.
- To encourage traffic at all tables, have a prize drawing which may be entered by attendees once they collect signatures from a certain number of tables.
- Have a booth for welcoming new parish members. New member packets should also be available.
- Have extra ministry brochure/booklet and commitment cards available for the vestibules. This will encourage greater awareness and further participation for the ministries throughout the year.

Ministry Fair Do's and Don'ts

DO:

- ◆ Get the support of your pastor, staff, and parish leadership. Ask them to promote the fair at their gatherings, meetings, etc.
- ◆ Form a team with as many volunteers as possible.
- ◆ Set a date well in advance of the fair. A successful fair takes a great deal of planning. Get the word out early!
- ◆ Personally invite every organization/ministry in your parish to provide information about their ministry – a brief description with the goal of the ministry, activities, contact information, when they meet, any training requirements, expectations, etc. You can use this to create your time and talent ministry booklet, brochure, or list.
- ◆ Invite each organization/ministry to set up a booth/table/display for parishioners to visit.
- ◆ Make sure every table/booth has someone present during the hours of the fair to answer any questions.
- ◆ Make sure the set-up allows for maximum visibility, fluidity of movement, and easy accessibility.
- ◆ Provide some sort of food and beverage during the fair.
- ◆ Locate the ministry fair in a place that will attract a great deal of traffic without being obstructive. Some parishes use the social hall, gathering space, or outdoor space. If you host the fair outdoors, make sure you have a rain contingency plan!
- ◆ Promote the fair as a change to explore the opportunities available at the parish. It is an education and informational experience – a time to celebrate the good things happening in you parish and inviting more people to be a part of it!

DON'T:

- Allow soliciting and sign-ups to go on during the fair. Putting people on the spot will work against you. In fact, it often reduces the number of people attending the fair. The fair is never to be a substitute for Commitment Sunday.
- Expect every organization to set up a table, and never try to coerce them into participating. Instead, let them see the fruits of this for the other ministries. They will be more likely to participate in the future.
- Try to do it all yourself. You will find parishioners who love to help with this time of event – use them!
- Try to hold a big ministry fair every year. It is very labor intensive on the part of many people. And unfortunately, due to the frustrations and burn-out, many parishes end up making the ministry fair their only stewardship effort for the year. While it can be fun, educational, and community building, it is not the most important part of your parish stewardship effort.