

Stewardship: A Living Faith

Getting Started

Why have a Stewardship Council?

The council would usually consist of the pastor, a chairperson, a vice-chairperson, and a representative from each of the primary committees, Finance Council, School Advisory Council, Youth Ministry, Hospitality, Marriage and Family, etc. Stewardship should ideally permeate all the other committees. To quote Jeff Foxworthy: If Sunday collections are slipping, numbers of volunteers are declining, newcomers aren't aware of what the Church offers, then you may need a Stewardship Council.

Who best serves on a Council?

People committed to Stewardship are usually daily communicants, at least regular Sunday mass attenders, people respected in the parish for their leadership skills and faithfulness, and spiritual people with determination and ability to get things done. A strong relationship with Jesus is the most important attribute of council members, because only Jesus will be able to give them the strength to sustain them through their work.

The Council needs a shared vision.

There is a need at the start for a clear consensus, a vision. You can't assume that everyone is like-minded. Leaders who have tried to form a stewardship council have told us that people arrive with diverse ideas and interests. Therefore, you might have an ardent advocate with recycling and environment, or outreach, or social justice. Another may equate stewardship with tithing. Yet another may be focused on pro-life matters. Another may want to adopt a third world parish while another wants to support a downtown homeless shelter and the last person just wants to paint the school classrooms with parent volunteers. These diverse views indicate the need for vision-forming and defining stewardship.

Stewardship is a way of life. It is more than tithing.

Jesus is the Good Shepherd and God wants us to live in covenant with him: "I will be your God and You shall be My people" Before returning to the Father, Jesus prayed for us: "Just Father, the world has not known you but I have known you; and these have known that you sent me. To them I have revealed your name and I will continue to reveal it so that your love for me may live in them, and I may live in them." John 17:25-26. What are some of the virtues that help us to live out the covenant: Spirituality? Hospitality? Stewardship? How are these virtues expressed: to know and care about each other? To welcome the stranger? Excellent liturgy? Ministries, retreats? Are these the prime concerns of a Stewardship Council? Probably not, but it is good to define them to see the total picture of what Jesus the Good Shepherd is to us. The expressions of Stewardship are a universal sense of ministry, works of justice and charity, and sacrificial giving in support of the Lord's work.

The Council needs a strategy.

Moving stewardship from theory to practical application requires sorting, discarding and organizing just like you do when you move into a new house. We start with a large statement that stewardship is managing for God all of his creation, which he owns and which he entrusts to us while we are on earth. That covers it, right? What is the strategy, what are the objectives, what are the tactics: A stewardship council might see the need to:

1. to convert minds and hearts – Christ renews his parish, Bible studies or other similar program can help.
2. it is important to plan a series of educational homilies on stewardship, conduct town hall meetings or survey on what the parish means, is, and could be for parish families
3. organize this information and report it back to the parish
4. set up structures (committees) to help meet these needs
5. work out ways to gather the harvest of people's sacrificial gifts.

Even the archbishop knows that he needs a vision and a plan and recently conducted a visioning process to identify key strategies for the next ten years. Written goals are measurable and allow for realistic strategies and timelines for both accountability and assessment of success.

Discern People's Gifts

One of the dangers in a parish just beginning to think in terms of stewardship of time and talent is that a sign-up sheet looks like a job jar at home. They know they are behind there, where their wives, husbands and children demand more time and attention, so they are reluctant to take on more work. In a large parish it is easy to think that someone else will do the volunteer task or job posted on the bulletin board or in the bulletin. Each of us has varied gifts. What are the spiritual gifts that God has given to each of us? Manifestation gifts: word of knowledge, faith, gifts of healing, working of miracles, prophecy, discerning of spirits, tongues, interpretation of tongues. These gifts come and go as God wills. The ministry gifts are mentioned in Ephesians: apostle, prophet, evangelist, pastor, and teacher. These are gifts of people to do the work of ministry so that Christ's body on earth can function as his true representative. There are motivational gifts, too. Romans 12: 6-8 says "We have gifts that differ according to the favor bestowed on each of us. One gift may be prophecy; its use should be in proportion to his faith. It may be the gift of ministry; it should be used for service. One who is a teacher should use his gift for teaching; one who has the power to exhort should exhort. He who gives alms should do so generously; he who rules should exercise his authority with care, he who performs works of mercy should do so cheerfully."

These gifts are like all the others. They are grace gifts. We do not deserve them. But because God loves us He gives them to us. They provide the motivating force for our lives. Because God created us with free will, we can choose to use our motivational gifts appropriately or we can choose to neglect them, or even abuse them. All gifts are for the building up of Christ's body, the Church, on earth. Stewardship is about building the Body of Christ. As stewards we are not rugged individualists, like a cowboy riding off into the sunset alone. We share our gifts. I'm old enough to be able to say with certainty that many people go through life never discerning their gifts or what God is calling for them to do with their lives. A Stewardship Council can help people see that all of us need to do the Father's will on earth. Do not beg

for helpers. Always use a discerning approach: We believe God has gifted you; we challenge you to use these gifts for the people God wants to reach THROUGH YOU!

Can you see the difference in these statements:

- The Church is a beggar; The Church is a proclaimer.
- Faith is imposed on a building; Faith responds to true terms of discipleship.
- Attention is placed on external acts; attention is placed on spiritual motivation
- Leaders impose ideas; God speaks through leaders.
- People are supporters; People are priest, prophet and king
- Information is to motivate; the word of God is used to sanctify and teach the grace of giving
- We-they; I-we

Facilitate the Sacrificial Giving of Treasure

A good tree produces good fruit. Not because someone likes it or there is a greater demand for it. No amount of coaxing will cause the tree to produce better fruit or more fruit.

Better fruit and a better harvest depend on a better tree. Fruit growers know this. Harvests from good trees come in good time from good trees, in good soil, under good nurture. There is a fallacy to think that because of the beck and call of a stewardship council there will be a rich harvest of fruit.

These are some of the nurturing steps that a Stewardship Council can and should do: Communicate often and always about stewardship; be accountable; be transparent; conduct annual appeals – annual means every year, same time, same message; emphasize in homilies the attitudes and graces of stewardship; initiate and orient newcomers to sacrificial giving; educate children about sacrificial giving; have an estate planning seminar, form a legacy society; encourage that the parish tithe to the larger community; ask for prayers, pray, ask for prayers, pray....

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Our A Living Faith leader guide is divided into segments based on a theme that to be successful our gifts should be intentional, planned and proportionate. New material is sent once or twice each year to the pastor and stewardship leader or parish administrator. The Leader Guide is designed so that users can add to it in the course of their work with ideas and insights:

1. The first section is general information about the spirituality of Stewardship
2. The second section is a call to prayer, homily helps, stewardship, scripture notes, and other suggestions to get started.
3. The third section is about planning and getting organized with ideas about ministry fairs, children's stewardship, and a very helpful facility planning survey.
4. The fourth section is about publicity and communication
5. The fifth section is about participation and how to invite people to give with sample letters and a handout that explains the archbishop's recommendation about ways to give
6. The sixth section is about planned giving, legacy societies, and other helps such as bequest language.