

Examples of Lay Witness Presentations

The following are actual presentations given by lay witnesses. While these presentations are individualized and cannot be used as they are, they serve as models for how lay witness presenters can express their thoughts.

Lay Witness Sample Presentation #1

Stewardship means different things to different people. Let me share with you what stewardship has come to mean to me. Reflecting back on the time spent growing up in Ohio, I've realized more and more not only how loving my parents were but also how wise they were. I learned a lot from my parents, but there are four things I learned from their example that have had a particular impact on my life. First was that God loves us. He is good and we can trust Him. Second was that each of us is given certain gifts and talents and one of our responsibilities in life is to discover what those gifts and talents are, develop them and use them to benefit others. Third was that to whom more is given, more is expected. Fourth was that having a job and spending time with your family is important but not enough. We also need to spend time being with and helping others.

With that kind of learning and my parents, kind of example, I did not have a great deal of difficulty in grasping the concept of stewardship of time and talent. I didn't call it that, but I did it. From the time I was in high school onward, I made sure I spent time doing things for and with other people, mostly through different types of volunteer work. As I continued to give of my time and talent, I realized that I was growing spiritually. God and other people became a more important part of my life.

After graduating from college and moving to Charlotte, I continued to give of my time and talent through various church groups and community boards. Yet something was still missing. You see, I gave of my time and talent but not my treasure. I reasoned that I spent so much time in church and community activities that I didn't need to give regularly to the church or other community groups. Sure, I gave some, but it was sporadic and unplanned.

It wasn't until my wife and I made an "Engaged Encounter" seven years ago that I started to look even more seriously at my relationship with God. We realized that we couldn't hold back on any area of our giving because God wasn't holding back on any area of His giving. We also decided that we wanted God to be the center of our marriage. That led us to a decision to start giving of our treasure in a planned and proportionate way. We started giving two percent of our income to the church and other charities in 1984. Five years later, we are giving at eight percent of our income to the church and other charities.

As we continued to give, we've learned that we are growing more spiritually and that our faith is deepening. By giving as we have, we have tried to place material things and money in their proper perspective. That has caused us to look at what we need versus what we want. For

example, when we bought a new home almost two years ago, we bought a somewhat smaller house than we might have if we hadn't been practicing stewardship of treasure.

Stewardship has become a way of life for us. It's not always easy, but we try to live it. Presently, I am spending eight hours a week in volunteer work outside of my job and my wife is spending three hours per week in volunteer work. In the area of treasure, 80 percent of our giving is church-related while the other 20 percent goes to community agencies. My wife and I are planning to move to the biblical tithe, 10 percent of our income, next month. Stewardship of time, talent and treasure has been and will continue to be an important part of our lives.

Lay Witness Sample Presentation #2

Stewardship: What is it? How do we do it? Will we like it? Does it hurt? Will it work for us? Why should we do it?

These are many of the questions that passed through my mind as we first considered stewardship as a program in my parish. We looked at various programs in existence and the more I looked at them the more I became convinced stewardship was something our parish should do. I guess I was really experiencing my own conversion to stewardship as a way of life. I kept seeing that the Church could never flourish and grow if everyone was supporting it like it was, with a contribution each week that I would never miss.

As I look back at my own decision on stewardship and its maturation in the last five years, I notice that my ideals have changed some. There were lots of reasons that I felt we should begin stewardship in our family. God has been very good to us. My husband and I have two healthy, happy children.

We have finally passed through the struggling years in our own business and now had time to think about other things. As I began to think about the church and what it meant to me, I realized that if everyone was making the kind of limited volunteer and financial commitment that I was then the church would not be here for my children. There was no other way it could continue with no higher level of support from me and other parishioners.

Besides, I had great expectations of the Church. It should be well equipped to teach my children all about the wonders of God. It should be able to care for the sick, feed the needy, care for the elderly.

If my expectations were right, then I had to do my part to make them a reality. I was already giving some time to the church and with that time my talents. But there had to be a strong commitment of time and a commitment of treasure if the church was going to be able to do all the things I wanted it to do.

Once I decided that perhaps stewardship was something our family needed to think about, I was rather hesitant to bring it up for family discussion. My husband is non Catholic. Would he feel the same as I do? How would we handle contributions of time and treasure to two churches? After we talked about how we felt and agreed that it was something we would try, my husband offered a simple solution. We would give one fourth of our treasure and time to his church and three-fourths to my church since our two children were members of our parish. We have never had a problem with this method.

Since we made our decision on stewardship, I think our outlook on lots of things has changed. We have become more supportive of various worthwhile needs and organizations in the community. I think it opened an avenue of thought that allows us to give without always questioning what we will get in return. I came to embrace stewardship through the church but I have grown in stewardship to include the entire community.

I feel that God expects us to minister to all people. My gift that fulfills my stewardship may be given to anyone who needs it. It is the giving and the support of God's children that is important. The spiritual rewards, the feeling of accomplishment that you are following God's way are the important things that you will reap from stewardship. You will know you are succeeding when the spirituality and feelings of stewardship far surpass the questions of how much you should give.

Lay Witness Sample Presentation #3

My first encounter with Stewardship was in 1987. I sat in my parish church in Columbus, Georgia and listened to two people from Jacksonville, Florida tell us their story and ask us to consider giving a percentage of our income and more of our time to the church and community.

Up until that time, I had thought I was doing pretty well. I had always given what I thought was generously to the church...especially in terms of money. I had been taught to "contribute to the support of the church", both in the parochial school I attended in Philadelphia, and by my parents. When we were growing up, there was no Saturday Vigil Mass. Saturday night was the time to get ready for Sunday. Baths, polishing shoes, washing and curling hair and getting our church envelopes ready were all part of the ritual. My Dad put \$5.00 in his envelope in the 1950's and each of us four kids put \$.10 in ours. These were placed on the mantle behind my mom and dad's wedding picture, ready to be picked up on our way to church on Sunday morning. When I grew up and got a job, I put \$5.00 in my envelope. I figured that was what grownups did.

We never consciously thought about the giving of time. It was just sort of expected that we would run errands for our neighbor who had only one leg, or cut the grass of the elderly lady across the street. It was just part of what you did when you took food to a family who had a death or someone in the hospital. These were the things I continued to do as a adult without ever giving much thought as to how much time was involved or why I was doing it.

It was only after listening to the folks from Jacksonville that I began to realize I wasn't even close to giving in proportion to what I had. My dad's \$5.00 in the 1950's and mine in the 1980's were entirely two different things. The little "good deeds" for other people were nice, but kind of sporadic.

My life has been richly blessed. I had a family who loved deeply, parents who sacrificed to bring up four children and instilled in each of us a strong sense of church and morality. I was well educated, had a job, a home, friends and reasonably good health. God had given me many blessings...and I had to give serious thought as to how I was responding to his gifts. It took a while for me to do something, because I didn't think I could raise my level of monetary giving, and I was pretty sure I didn't have any "spare time" to volunteer. I eventually decided to "take the plunge", but only on a trial basis of three months. I would give a tithe of 10% to my church and other charities, and I would find two more hours each week to volunteer for something. I fully expected to be able to say at the end of three months, "OK, Lord. I tried, but it doesn't work." That way, I figured I would be "off the hook".

Well, at the end of three months, I found that all of the bills had been paid, I wasn't suffering from malnutrition, I saved some money, bought clothes and went to the movies a few times. I also found out that I wasn't worrying about money nearly as much as I had been. I had become a reading tutor in our county literacy program and loved it. I obviously wasn't "off the hook", but was hooked.

Since that summer in 1987 the one overwhelming change in life has been a deepening of my faith. I really trust that God loves me and will take care of me. He has done it...even when I wasn't sure it could be done. I guess my response to those who question the concepts of Stewardship, or who are hesitant, is this: At least give it a try. Give God the opportunity to show you that He is a loving and generous God. He can only do that when we give up control and take that step in faith.