

# A Guide for the Stewardship of Treasure Lay Witness

Stories – we are all captivated by them. Magazines and newspapers are always looking for a good human interest story. Every good preacher shares stories which connect to the great story of God’s love for us in Jesus. In the late Archbishop Thomas Murphy’s last talk on stewardship, he shared a story of his own life and struggle with leukemia, and the importance to him of the “gift of life” in the form of donations of blood. Jesus used stories to teach and inspire others. The Gospel writers, through their own stories that witness to their lives with Jesus, still bring about life-changing conversions for millions of people – even now, over 2000 years later.

Far from “tooting our own horn”, every time we share our own story, we are witnessing to the generosity of a loving God. Witnessing is one of the most powerful and effective means of presenting the message of stewardship. Properly prepared and delivered, it has the potential to change people’s lives for God. Witnessing is a sharing from your heart to the heart of your listeners, inspired by the Holy Spirit. What you offer is a living witness to the good news of Jesus.

## THE ROLE OF THE LAY WITNESS TALK

This lay witness talk is usually given after the homily by Catholics who are already practicing stewardship in their own lives. It may be given by an individual, or a couple. At times, even children may witness.

The lay witness talk has two purposes:

- to inspire people to become strong Christian stewards, and
- to share “real life” examples of how stewardship is lived.

A stewardship lay witness talk should include **four basic elements**: personalization, definition and scripture, detail and invitation.

## PERSONALIZATION

People love to hear a story. A story catches attention. A story brings an idea down to earth and makes it real. Thus it is important that your stewardship witness talk include a personal and heartfelt story about how stewardship is real in your life. Your story could be about any of the following:

- When and how you first realized the importance of stewardship.
- How stewardship impacts your everyday family life at home, at work, or in the parish.
- What joys you have experienced as a result of your stewardship.
- How you have overcome a challenge to your stewardship.

## DEFINITION AND SCRIPTURE

It is important to define the Church’s understanding of Christian stewardship. Stewardship is an intentional, planned, proportionate giving of our time, talent and treasure in response to God’s generosity. You may find other definitions of stewardship or define it in your own words based on the main ideas in the above definition.

Stewardship is not some new idea that your parish or the Catholic Church just invented to raise money. Stewardship is a concept that is as old as Sacred Scripture. Throughout the Old and New Testament, God has clearly asked us to live as stewards, giving back to him a grateful



portion of all that God has given us. It is important that your witness talk is rooted in scripture. Look at the Sunday scriptures assigned for the weekend that you witness to see how they you might refer to them. Use other scripture quotes as appropriate.

### **DETAIL**

It is important that your witness talk provide parishioners with clear details of what it is the parish wants them to do.

Present parish giving patterns, if pastor wishes (though this is better done in a letter from the pastor to all parishioners).

Explain the Intention Form (that they will be receiving in the mail, in the pew this week; whatever the parish is doing to obtain commitment).

Include other specifics of your parish's stewardship campaign.

### **INVITATION**

Personally invite your fellow parishioners to commit to a life of Christian stewardship.

Invite them to reflect upon their own blessings and gifts.

Challenge them to consider if their giving reflects their blessings.

Remind them that stewardship is a total giving of ourselves—including a balance of time, talent and treasure.

Invite them to continue to celebrate this Mass, reflecting on how they are called to be the Body and Blood of Christ in this parish and in the world.

## **THE LAY WITNESS TALK**

### **1. Introduce yourself.**

Give a description of yourself and your family, the number of years in the parish, etc.; or tell a personal stewardship story and then introduce yourself.

### **2. Properly define Christian stewardship. Share passages from Scripture which highlight the Christian steward as a caretaker and giver of God's gifts. Share a passage which particularly inspires you.**

Stewardship is a response that disciples of Christ make in gratitude for what God has given. Stewardship is taking care of and sharing all God's gifts. Stewardship is an intentional, planned, proportionate giving of our time, talent and treasure.

Stewardship:

asks that we help each other recognize the gifts and talents with which God has blessed us and the ways in which we have been blessed through the gifts and talents of others.

invites us to help discern, call forth and continually encourage one another to use the gifts and talents with which God has blessed us according to God's will.

challenges us to share our time, talent and treasure beyond what we may have done in the past so we can grow, individually and collectively, as God desires.

calls for us to be changed by our giving of time, talent and treasure.

The US Bishops have defined a Christian steward as someone who is:

grateful for God's gifts

generous in sharing these gifts with others



accountable for his or her use of God's gifts  
willing to return them to God with increase.

### **3. Discuss how you began practicing stewardship.**

When did you first become aware of this concept? What did you think when you first heard about it? What happened in your life to cause you to make changes in the sharing of your blessings? How did your family react to the idea? Was the initial "leap of faith" difficult? How did you go about it? What motivated you to make a change in the way you were living?

Bishop Thomas Murphy asked a profound question of those aspiring to become strong Christian stewards, "What do I own, and what owns me"? The answer to this question gives Christian stewards a path to conversion.

### **4. Share the effects of living stewardship.**

How has living a life of stewardship changed your life? your faith life? the way you live in our world? Talk about your own growth as a giver, the challenges it presented, and the benefits and blessings that resulted. Explain stewardship as a Christian journey, not a destination. Once we embrace stewardship as a way of life, we find that life is different in many ways: generosity in relationships, the way we spend our time, our attitude of gratitude, our use of money, caring for the world, providing for the Church.

**5. Explain how the parish stewardship process works and invite parishioners into this way of living.** Tell parishioners how the parish's stewardship process works. Use visual aids (Intention Form). Invite the assembly to join you and your family into a life of stewardship. Ask parishioners to reflect upon God's multiple gifts in their lives, and invite them to generously and lovingly share of their time, talent and treasure as a way of thanking God for their abundance. Invite them to continue to celebrate this Mass aware of their call to be the Body and Blood of Christ in the world.

## **LAY WITNESS DO'S**

1. Do emphasize that stewardship is grateful giving of ourselves. God owns everything. We are on earth to share the blessings and gifts that God has given us.
2. Do remind people that the stewardship way of life is deeply rooted in sacred scripture, both the Old and New Testament. (Remember, over half of Christ's parables related to money and stewardship).
3. Do ask people to reflect on what is good in their lives. Ask them if God gets any credit for this goodness. Ask them how they show their thankfulness to God for this goodness.
4. Do talk about giving a grateful share of time, talent and treasure. Stress that a grateful share is the first share. Explain that stewardship means giving of the "first fruits," not what is left over.
5. Do present stewardship as a total way of Christian life - a way we make decisions and choices, a way we live everyday of our lives. Explain that stewardship touches every area of our lives—

faith, family, friends, workplace, community, Church.

6. Do talk about the importance of planning. Explain that stewardship of treasure means making a commitment to give a specific percentage or amount of our income on a regular basis, not just once in awhile. Encourage people to take time to calculate what percentage they currently give to God.

Also encourage people to have a plan for gradually increasing that percentage to an amount that truly reflects their gratitude to God.

7. Do talk about the need each of us has to give back in gratitude.
8. Do share your struggles with stewardship as well as your triumphs. People will appreciate your honesty and will be more open to your message if they can identify with you.
9. Do emphasize the sense of peace that comes when we put God first.
10. Do arouse feelings of gratitude for all the gifts God gives to us.
11. Do have your witness talk reviewed by someone you trust before you give it. Plan to speak for 8-10 minutes.
12. Do be well prepared. Rehearse aloud many times.
13. Do make certain you find out from where you will be speaking in the Church.
14. Do talk with the assembly, not at them. This community already believes, so share with them your unique story. Use “we/us” when talking about the assembly, not “you/they”. We are all part of this community of faith.

### **LAY WITNESS TALK DON'TS**

1. Don't talk in “bargaining” terms (“I gave this and God gave me this in return.”)
2. Don't stress church needs or budgets. Stewardship is about our need to give back, not the parish's need for “things.”
3. Don't talk in dollar or time amounts: “If everyone could give \$10 a week.” Or “We need \$2 more a week from everyone.” or “You need to give your fair share.” Let people decide for themselves what is a grateful and proportionate gift.
4. Don't stress the 10% tithe as a strict and intimidating obligation. This will seem unrealistic for many people and only sour them on the whole concept of stewardship.
5. Don't use threats of possible consequences stemming from the failure to give: “We won't be able to heat or air-condition the church.” or “We'll have to close the school.”
6. Don't suggest that stewardship is mandatory or an obligation.



7. Don't apologize for talking about money.

8. Don't say "thank you" at the end of your witness. This type of ending begs for applause which is what we do not want to happen. Give a strong ending as described and then step back and bow your head in a moment or two of silent reflection.



## LAY WITNESS TALK PREPARATION SUGGESTIONS

An important part of people's acceptance of the value of stewardship is the personal witness and individual testimony you provide with your presence and the way you present your stewardship journey. The following are suggestions in preparing your reflections:

1. **Pray.** Spend time talking and listening to God. Reflect on the many blessings you have received. Thank God for his generosity. Think about where you are on your personal stewardship journey and how you arrived there. Allow the Spirit to guide your words as you begin to prepare to share your journey.
2. **Prepare** your witness talk so you are comfortable with it. Follow the outline and element provided in this packet. Use your own style, wording and delivery. Use stories. Write out your talk using numbered or bulleted lists rather than long sentences. This may make it easier for you to make eye contact with the assembly. Use a font size that is easy to see—at least 12 or 14 point and consider double-spacing. Write out verbatim your opening and closing so that you can begin and end strongly. End your witness by leading the assembly into the Eucharist. Do not end by saying “thank you” because that usually elicits applause, rather than reflection.
3. It is best to **rehearse** your witness talk aloud. If you just practice reading it silently, you won't be fully prepared. If it is possible, practice it in the church when no one is there and use the sound system. Be comfortable enough with your witness talk so that you can look up from your notes and make eye contact, not just “peek” at the assembly. In a large church remember to turn to the sides occasionally to include everyone. After you finish, step back slightly and bow your head for a few moments of meditation.
4. Be **sincere, enthusiastic and friendly**. It is more important to be comfortable and share your experience from the heart than to be eloquent.

### GETTING STARTED...AND ENDING UP

Many find that the hardest part of any kind of talk is getting started and winding up. So really write those sections out so you can begin and end strongly. To open your stewardship talk, you could simply introduce yourself: “Good morning (evening). I'm Mary Garcia and this is my husband, Ramon. We are parishioners here at St. Chela's along with our three children, Carmen, Anita and Antonio, and my mother, Josephine Rivera, who lives with us. We'd like to share with you what stewardship means to our family and how it has affected our lives.” Or you could begin with a story about your family's experience of stewardship and then introduce yourself.

The following is a possible ending: “As we continue with our liturgy this morning (evening), and our monetary gifts are collected and brought before the Lord, let each of us ask ourselves if this gift of treasure which we offer today is truly a measure of our gratitude for what we have been given. Once we believe in our hearts and souls that everything we have is a gift from God, we will want to share God's goodness with our parish, our archdiocese, our community and our world”.

Another ending might be: “Now as we continue to celebrate this liturgy, let us reflect on our call to be the Body and Blood of Christ in our parish and in our world”.



## **SUGGESTIONS FOR THE DAY OF YOUR STEWARDSHIP WITNESS**

1. Dress appropriately.
2. Arrive at least 15 minutes before the scheduled Mass time.
3. Identify yourself to the priest-presider before the liturgy begins. Be sure to confirm any logistics such as:
  - a). Where will you sit—in the sanctuary, in a front pew...?
  - b). Will you be part of the entrance/closing procession?
  - c). What else should you be aware of?
4. Speak slowly, loudly and clearly. It is important that your message is understood.
5. Greet people after Mass at the entrance to the church. This is an opportunity to talk informally with parishioners who may want to meet you.
6. Fully, consciously and actively participate in every Mass at which you witness. It is not appropriate for you to leave after your witness, even if you are speaking at several Masses.

### **A DIFFERENT TWIST ON THE LAY WITNESS TALK....**

In some parishes where stewardship lay witnessing has been happening for many years, there may be a feeling that we have said and done all this before. The stewardship committee may be searching for a new way to touch the parish community. Before you try something different for your stewardship witness, remember that personal witness is critically important in stewardship education. Be sure to incorporate personal witness into any new approach. Do not let your creativity overshadow the stewardship message. You may want to entertain the assembly, but motivating them to more fully embrace stewardship is most essential.

#### **COUPLE WITNESSING:**

Have a husband and wife share the witnessing. They can discuss how together, as a family, they have come to live stewardship more fully.

#### **GROUP WITNESSING:**

Have a variety of parishioners come forward to present a short thought or witness on stewardship. The group could include: a man, a woman, an older adult, a younger adult, people representing a variety of parish organizations. These speakers would be assigned to give personal or scriptural reflection and would invite the assembly into this way of life. One person, serving as the coordinator of the group, would explain what you are going to do and would end the witnessing with a broader invitation.

#### **DRAMATIZATION:**

A mini-play could catch attention in a parish that has done witness talks for years. Some ideas are listed below:

- One parishioner explaining to a new or skeptical parishioner what stewardship means personally and for the parish.
- A staged radio or television interview about stewardship.
- Children (real children or adults acting like children) explaining stewardship as if through

the eyes of kids commenting on their parents' stewardship.

-A saint - possibly the parish patron saint- returned to earth to try to understand our modern day needs and wants vs. stewardship.

## **SAMPLE STEWARDSHIP LAY WITNESS TALK #1**

### ***Introduction and Definition:***

Good morning. My name is Steve Smith and I am here to talk to you for a few minutes about stewardship. Christian stewardship is giving your time, talent and treasure back to God in appreciation for all that God has given to you. I want to share with you my personal experience in trying to be a good steward in this parish.

### ***Personalization***

I am thankful to both God and to our parish for allowing me the opportunity to participate as an active member in this great parish of ours. I have worked with many of you with our children's sports program and our parish picnics. When I first came to this parish I did not have a clue how I would be able to participate in this great community that many of you and those who came before us had built. At our first parents' meeting I took a daring first step and raised my hand and said, "Sure, I'll get involved. What do you want me to do?" Boy, did my life change! I began associating names with those faces I would see at Mass each week. Parish was no longer a bunch of strangers, but a community of friends, a family. After organization meetings I would find myself energized and eager to participate the next meeting. I can't begin to tell you the joy and happiness I have received as a member actively contributing and working in this parish. My involvement provided me with a sense of belonging. Accomplishments were being made and I was participating in them.

### ***Scripture***

I also discovered that it was true what Jesus told us in Matthew 6: 21— "For where your treasure is, there also will your heart be." In keeping with God's command to us to give back our first fruits, my wife and I have made a commitment to give a percentage of our income every month to the Church, before we do anything else. This isn't always easy, but it is always very gratifying to know that we are giving back to God from the many blessings we have received. And I can tell you that somehow God has provided for us and our heart is truly in our parish and that is a joyful thing.

### ***Detail***

I don't tell you all of this to brag about what I have done, but rather to encourage you, too, to know the joy and happiness that my family and I have found by giving time, talent and treasure to our parish.

Later this week (*or whenever parish has determined*) you will receive a letter from PASTOR NAME, a brochure and an intention form in the mail. (*Hold up a copy of the Intention Form*).

I encourage you to pray about your gift of treasure to the parish. Does your



financial support of PARISH NAME truly reflect all of the blessings God has given to you? Then complete the intention form and return it in the collection basket next week. This intention form is very important because it will help us plan for our parish's future needs and ministries and it will help you concretize your stewardship of treasure.

***Invitation***

I encourage you—from my own personal experience—don't be afraid to get involved. Good things happen when you share of yourself; you will know the deep joy that comes from being a part of God's work here on earth. As we continue this liturgy, let us pray that we will all embrace our call to be more and more Christ's Body and Blood in the world.

In closing, I leave you with this thought on gratitude by Thomas Merton.

“To be grateful is to recognize the love of God in everything he has given us – and He has given us everything. Every breath we draw is a gift of His love, every moment of existence is a grace, for it brings with it immense graces from Him. Gratitude therefore takes nothing for granted, is never unresponsive, is constantly awakening to new wonder and to praise of the goodness of God. For the grateful person knows that God is good, not by hearsay but by experience. And that is what makes all the difference”.



## **SAMPLE STEWARDSHIP LAY WITNESS TALK #2**

Good morning. I'm Ernie Rodriguez and I am here today to share some thoughts with you on Stewardship. We've been hearing a lot lately from Fr. Tom about stewardship and our church bulletin has also been trying to explain just what Stewardship is, how we should respond to it, how it affects our lives, and how we should return some of the gifts of Time, Talent and Treasure that God has so graciously provided us with.

If I had to choose one word to describe Stewardship, that word would be gratitude. Stewardship is all about gratitude to God, for all the gifts that he gives us each day, the big gifts and the small ones. Stewardship is not about money; it's about taking care of, and sharing all of God's gifts of Time, Talent and Treasure. It involves a change of heart and mind, and not just with a single action, or even in a series of actions, but in one's entire lifetime. It's about how we respond to the Lord's call to be his disciples and how we live out that faithful response in our daily lives.

Stewardship is not something new. Throughout the Old and New Testament God has clearly asked us to live as stewards, giving back to him a grateful portion of all that he has given us. There are many examples of how Stewardship has played a role in our lives. Just last Sunday we heard a reading from the first book of Kings where a widow is called out by Elijah to bring him a cup of water and a bit of bread. The widow responded that there was only a handful of flour in her jar and a little oil in her jug, which was only enough for her and her son. Elijah explained to her that if she took care of him and had faith, her jar of flour shall not go empty, nor the jug of oil run dry. She did as Elijah had said and she and her son were able to eat for a year until the rains came again.

When I was a little boy growing up in Santa Cruz, my parents taught me how important it was to give back to church and to the community in many ways. I was the youngest child of 17 and even though we didn't have much ourselves in those days, they showed me other families that had less. Some of our neighbors were incapable of taking care of themselves because of physical or mental disabilities. My mom and dad made it our duty to take care of them, no questions asked. We would share our fruits and vegetables with them, and my dad would send us over to help them dig their ditches and help them with their chores. My mom would make cheese out of goat's milk and send some over along with some homemade bread and tortillas. And even though our lives were very busy with taking care of the animals and tending to our large garden, my dad always made sure we made time to help them. And you know something, our fruit trees gave us more fruit than we could eat, our plants gave us more vegetables than we could can, and our goats gave us more milk than we could drink. "Our jar of flour never went empty, nor our jug of oil never went dry."

Stewardship takes careful planning with our time schedule, our families and our finances. We must pray on this, so we can make a commitment to help and give on a regular basis, not just once in a while. There are many things that our parish and



community rely on us for, such as our weekly donations to cover operational expenses, but more importantly to provide ministries and services to the people of our parish. We have many programs that need our help such as religious education, home and hospital Communion visits, St. Vincent de Paul, our daily and Sunday Masses and Bible study just to name a few. All of these ministries need our help in one form or another to make them a success.

Okay I can hear you all saying to yourself...“that sounds pretty good for someone else, but I am too young or I’m too old, or I’ve done my share, now it’s time for the younger generation to take over.” As I mentioned before there are many ministries that you can help out with, no matter what your age, disabilities or skills. For example we are in the process of remodeling the upstairs of Fr. Bulman Hall, turning it into a new library. When we called out for help, many of you came. One parishioner brought his young son along. The young boy first thought “How am I going to help, I have no skills in remodeling.” This young boy was a tremendous help in running for parts, tools and materials all night long. At the end of the night, he had worked just as hard as everyone else. Plus he also learned a lot and felt very good about himself helping out with this project. We have another parishioner that is blind, yet he reads at Mass beautifully. I can go on and on with examples of how we can help, instead of saying, “I am too old, I’m too young, I’m too busy, or I have a game tonight. We can all help in one way or the other; we all have gifts to share.

It is also very important to teach our children to share their gifts of time, talent and treasure. Back in my younger days, and many of you can probably relate to this story, of cashing in coke bottles at the country store. We use to ride our bikes all over the place looking for coke bottles to cash them in for candy, but we always had to save a nickel to put in our little church donation envelope. Back then Holy Cross Church gave us school kids little envelopes and we made a commitment to give that nickel every Sunday. And there were times when we ate more candy than we should of and didn’t have the nickel to put in that Sunday, but we would make it up the following Sunday. And we learned what it took to make a commitment and to give to the church at a young age. There are many of you that have made this Stewardship commitment today, but there are a few of you that are not giving of your Time, Talent or Treasure. I ask you today to pray on this commitment of Stewardship, not only for the sake of the parish, but also for yourself and for your own heart. You will also feel more at home because of the work you are doing here in the parish.

The Gospel of Mark gives us the ultimate Stewardship story where Jesus was sitting opposite of the treasury, and watched the crowd putting money into the treasury. Many rich people put in large sums. A poor widow came and put in two small copper coins, which are worth about a penny. Then he called his disciples and said to them, “Truly I tell you, this poor widow has put in more than those who are contributing to the treasury. For all of them have contributed out of their abundance; but she out of her poverty has put in everything she had, all she had to live on.” For Christians, Stewardship means being responsible for all the gifts, talents and treasure God has given us, and it means being generous to others, not for the sake of any reward, but out of gratitude for the blessings we have received from a generous and loving God.

Now as we continue to celebrate this liturgy, I ask you to bow your heads and to prayerfully reflect on Stewardship and say thank you to God, so that you will make a

decision to give of your time, talent and treasure to our parish and to our community. “Lord Jesus, we believe that you have called us to follow you with our whole heart, in all our words and actions. Send us your spirit to give us the power to serve you faithfully. Lord Jesus, we believe that Stewardship is a way of life. Send us your spirit to help us live grateful, generous and responsible lives. In you O Lord, is the source of life. Send forth your light and your truth. Fill us each morning with your constant love, so that we may sing and be glad all of our lives. Lord our God, may your blessing be upon us, and give us success in all that we do”.

