A Parish Model for Lay Witness Talks for Annual Stewardship Renewals

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 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 the 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.

Why Have a Witness Speak About Money?

Who likes to talk about money in church? For many it seems so unspiritual, so materialistic. However, in the Gospels we see that Jesus was not reluctant to talk about money. Over half of His parables concern money or other possessions. Jesus knew that few things reveal more about our spiritual condition than what we do with our money. Jesus pointed 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. A wise priest once said, "Show me a person's checkbook, and I'll tell you a good deal about the state of his/her soul."

“Where your treasure is, there will your heart be also” (Lk 12:34).

Witness Selection and Recruiting

An essential part of the presentation of Parish Stewardship is individual testimony. This will require selective recruiting of individuals who will share with the parish family their personal life experiences in giving money and time and talent. Individual testimony allows select parishioners to share with the congregation their own faith story and experience about how they relate their giving of money with their faith, and how they see their giving of money as an important expression of their faith.

Some criteria for selecting a lay witness speaker should be that the person is:
• a giver of time, talent and money;
• a communicator who articulates well before a group; and
• a prayerful individual who has an understanding of the theology and spiritual benefits of stewardship and sacrificial giving.

Many parishes have decided that the best way to invite and recruit potential lay witnesses is their personal approach, which can take either one of these forms.

1) The Pastor sends a letter affirming the individual's faith, gifts, and grasp of stewardship principles, while inviting the person to make a lay witness presentation. (The Stewardship Committee in many parishes prepares the letter for the Pastor to modify according to his style and to approve.)

2) The Pastor calls by phone potential lay witness speakers and invites them to participate, while affirming their potential to "share their story" of faith as it relates to stewardship.

It is good to not have the same lay witness speakers all the time.
SAMPLE OUTLINE FOR COMPOSING LAY WITNESS TALK

1. INTRODUCE YOURSELF - People want to know who is talking to them. 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 has been given to us. It is an intentional, planned, proportionate giving of our time, talent and treasure.

3. DISCUSS HOW YOU BEGAN PRACTICING STEWARDSHIP - When did you first become aware of the concept? What did you think when you first heard about it? 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? What motivated you to make a change in the way you were living?

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 of your time and talent? Were you able to give a 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 their parish a stewardship parish. Ask them to look at all that God has given to them and make a generous response to God's many gifts.
Tips for Presenting Your Stewardship Journey

An important part of people'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:

1. Pray. Spend time talking to and listening to God. Reflect on the many blessings you have received. Think about where you are on your personal stewardship journey and how you arrived there. Allow the Holy Spirit to guide your words as you begin to prepare to share your journey.

2. 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 or key words to guide you through your presentation so that is more natural.

3. For you to give a good presentation, it is best to rehearse your talk aloud. If you just practice reading it silently, you won't have the same effect. If it is possible, practice it in the church when no one is there, using the sound system. 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 to include everyone.

4. 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.

5. Above all, be sincere, enthusiastic and friendly. Graciously respond to any feedback that is offered.
Some Do's and Don'ts

DO (if time permits and any of these fit into your talk):

1. Explain that stewardship means giving of the "first fruits," not what is left over.
2. Talk about the need each of us has to give back in gratitude.
3. Share your struggles with stewardship as well as your triumphs. People will appreciate your honesty and be more open to your message if they can identify with you.
4. Emphasize the sense of peace that comes when we put God first.
5. Emphasize that is important to give all three: Time, Talent and Treasure.
6. Explain that stewardship touches every area of our lives. It's about how we share with our family, friends, workplace, and community as well as our Church (parish and diocese).

DON'T:

1. Talk in "bargaining" terms ("I gave this and God gave me this in return.")
2. Stress church needs or budgets.
3. 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."
4. 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."
5. Suggest that stewardship is mandatory or 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. Sharing your spiritual journey with other members of your church is a unique gift and a true statement of your commitment to stewardship.
Beginning and Ending

BEGINNING

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 and our two children, John and Mary. We are parishioners at 81. Mary's Parish in Any City. We'd like to share with you what stewardship means to our family and how it has affected our lives."

ENDING

The following is an example of a closing paragraph: "As we continue with our liturgy this morning/ evening and our gifts are brought forward to the table let us reflect on all that God has given us and ask ourselves how we have been using those gifts. Is our gift of treasure a measure of the gratitude we have for what we have been given? How do we use our time and talent to serve others in our family, community, workplace and Church? 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."


**Constructing Your Presentation**

1. The presentation should be 6-8 minutes long, clear and concise.

2. Make sure you know which stewardship approach you are asked to convey. Does the pastor want you to make specific mention of intention cards or other items?

3. Tell a story about your stewardship journey. Remember: people love to hear stories about other people! This should be the bulk of your presentation because your story can help others to make changes and that's why we do this!
   
   a) What happened in your life to cause you to make changes in the sharing of your blessings? Your telling of this story can help others to consider changes in their lives.

   b) You may want to talk about your own growth as a giver, the challenges it presented, and the benefits and blessings that resulted.

4. Read the scriptures for the day you are speaking and refer to them if possible. You can include some comments from the Bishops' Pastoral Letter on Stewardship, but be careful to avoid "over-quoting" your audience.

5. Explain briefly what stewardship is, noting that it is more than sharing the gift of treasure. Explain it is the sharing of the first fruits of all of our blessings coupled with trust in God to provide for our own needs.

6. Avoid using numbers and statistics as "guilt-trips."

7. Ask them, point blank, to pray about and consider becoming better stewards of their blessings.

8. Thank the pastor for the opportunity to speak and thank the parishioners for their past generosity and support.

9. Please provide the pastor with a copy of your presentation in advance.
A Check List of Reminders for Stewardship Speakers

1. Plan to arrive at least 15 minutes before the scheduled mass time.

2. Identify yourself to the celebrant before liturgy begins. Be sure to confirm any logistics such as:
   a) Where you will be speaking from (some churches have more than one pulpit)?
   b) Find out where to sit -near the altar, in a front pew, on the altar?
   c) Will you be processing in with the celebrant, altar servers, etc.

3. Speak slowly, loudly and clearly. Your message is useless if people cannot understand.

4. It is far more important to believe what you are saying than to be eloquent.

5. Dress appropriately.

6. Be prepared to greet people after Mass at the back of the church. This is an opportunity to chat informally with parishioners who may want to meet you.