

*Discipleship Gratitude Generosity*



# BEST PRACTICES

in a *Stewardship* Parish

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ARCHDIOCESE  OF MILWAUKEE

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*As each one has received a gift, use it to serve one another  
as good stewards of God's varied grace.*

1 Peter 4:10

“I have three pastoral priorities for the Archdiocese of Milwaukee:

*Catholic Identity* (who we are),  
*Evangelization* (what we do),  
and *Stewardship* (how we do it).”

ARCHBISHOP JEROME E. LISTECKI  
*Archdiocese of Milwaukee*

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“A Christian Steward is one who receives God’s gifts gratefully,  
cherishes and tends them in a responsible and accountable manner,  
shares them in justice and love with others, and returns them  
with increase to the Lord.”

STEWARDSHIP: A DISCIPLE’S RESPONSE  
*U.S. Bishops’ Pastoral Letter*

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“A Christian life lived with charity and faith is the  
most effective form of evangelization.”

DISCIPLES CALLED TO WITNESS:  
THE NEW EVANGELIZATION  
*U.S. Bishops’ Pastoral Letter*

# *Prayer of Faithful Stewards*

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Heavenly Father,

We give you thanks for the inspiration of your Holy Spirit as we reflect on the gospel call to exercise Christ's stewardship on our journey of faith.

We ask you to guide us in our discernment and show us how to be faithful in the plans we make, the actions we take, and the love we share on our pilgrim way.

Give us the courage to find wisdom in our sacrifices, joy in our generosity, and hope in the compassion we show, especially to those most in need of your comfort and care.

Create in us a more open heart and a greater awareness of our need to grow, to change, to be transformed, so that we may be better stewards of your gifts for the good of all.

Amen.

# *Introduction*

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An inseparable link exists between stewardship and evangelization in the life of every Catholic. The overarching goal of a parish stewardship plan should be to invite parishioners into deeper personal relationships with Jesus, so that all can live more faithfully as disciples. Living as faithful stewards, our faith lives are on fire, and we cannot help but share our love of Jesus with others.

As individuals, then entire communities, begin to embrace stewardship as a way of life, parishes flourish. Ministries thrive, worship is reinvigorated, and outreach increases. Each step on a parish's stewardship journey brings the community closer to the goal of becoming a spiritually vibrant, therefore financially secure parish. Our challenge lies in helping parishioners embrace a new vision, moving beyond "stewardship equals money" to "stewardship equals mission."

There is no one single process or program that will guaranty the instant success of any parish stewardship initiative. All Catholic parishes have much in common, yet each is unique in its own right. While successful stewardship parishes incorporate many of the same steps into their stewardship plans, "best practices" are only effective when applied as part of a comprehensive effort that reflects the history, personality and resources of each parish.

Parishes of all sizes, and varied resources, are making the journey toward embracing stewardship as a way of life. The "best practices" in this booklet are offered as guideposts along the way.

## THIS BOOKLET WILL:

- Dispel commonly-held misconceptions about stewardship.
- Define stewardship as a way of life.
- Illustrate the great need to reinvigorate and enhance parish stewardship culture.
- Outline the role of pastoral and lay leadership.
- Describe the scope and responsibilities of the Stewardship Committee.
- Present community-building activities.
- Offer communications strategies.
- Detail components of annual commitments of time, talent and financial support.
- Provide the framework for beginning.



# *What Is Stewardship?*

As we seek to invite Catholics into the understanding and practice of authentic stewardship, we often must begin by challenging long-held ideas and attitudes.

## *Misconceptions About Stewardship*

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- It's only about getting more money by any method possible.
- It's a program we "do" once a year.
- It's the Pastor's responsibility.
- Don't we have a committee for that?
- We've already tried that – and it doesn't work.
- It's a quick fix that can solve all of our problems - and we only have to "do" it once!

By clearing away these misconceptions, we open room in the hearts and minds of parishioners to consider stewardship in a new, holistic way. There are many definitions of Christian stewardship, and each recognizes good stewardship as a faith response.

## *Stewardship is...*

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- “...fundamentally the work of the Spirit in our lives. It is, ultimately, the pull and the power of the Gospel come alive in our times and circumstances.”  
*(U.S. Catholic Bishops’ pastoral letter, Stewardship: A Disciple’s Response)*
- “...passing on God’s love – understanding God’s love as manifest in every breath, birth to death, and everything sandwiched in between: all of creation, our families, our aptitudes, our talents, our treasures temporal and spiritual, everything.”  
*(Colleen Smith, Catholic Stewardship – Sharing God’s Gifts, 2001 Our Sunday Visitor Publishing)*
- ...the philosophy, the spirituality from which we, as people of God, live out our baptismal call to serve others and to serve God.
- ...a way of life, achieved through conversion of heart and mind, in which we recognize that all we have is a gift from our generous God, meant to be shared with others.
- ...not about something we do. It is about who we are, and Whose we are.
- ...an act of worship, not an act of obligation.
- ...simply putting our faith first each and every day.



# *A Critical Moment in Time*

The evolution of our parish communities and of society in general has brought us to a critical juncture. The need for strong Catholic parishes, and the ministries they offer, grows larger each day. At the same time many parishes struggle just to maintain the status quo, hoping that ministries and services will not have to be down-sized, or eliminated altogether. The ability and willingness of parish leaders to teach, form and encourage parishioners to live stewardship as a way of life may well determine the success, perhaps even the survival, of the parish community. Successful parishes develop a culture of stewardship that is, in many aspects, diametrically opposed to the world around us. We are fighting an up-hill battle.

## *Key Research-Based Findings*

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### **1. THE LANDSCAPE IN OUR PARISHES IS CHANGING.**

- Only 30% of Americans raised as Catholic are still practicing, with about half of them attending Mass on a given weekend.
- Parishioner engagement, when examined as a factor of total parish households, is low, with approximately 20% of parishioners actively volunteering their time and 30% offering financial support.
- Unlike decades ago when priests and nuns staffed our parishes and schools, increasingly our parishes are staffed by lay people who need to be paid just wages.



- Studies show that large parishes (defined as 2000+ households) receive significantly lower support at all levels when calculated as a factor of participation, with parishioners feeling that their participation won't be missed since there are so many "others" who will contribute talent and financial resources.
- Organizations that strengthened the bonds of community among parishioners are dwindling, with parish Holy Name Societies, Christian Women's groups and others parish groups disappearing.

## 2. SOCIETY FOSTERS THE CULTURE OF "ME."

- Active involvement in civic and community organizations has fallen by more than 50% over the last few decades.
- Membership in PTAs, fraternal organizations and civic clubs is becoming a thing of the past. By the late 1990s studies showed that nearly two-thirds of all Americans said that they never attend a club meeting of any kind.
- Studies show that the average adult is exposed to 300 – 400 commercial messages per day from sources including Twitter, pop-up web banners, e-mail solicitations, automated cell/phone calls, mail, radio and television; each one reinforcing the message that what we own defines who we are.
- Our per capita consumption continues to increase, from \$19,996 in 1998 to \$39,600 in 2011.
- 1 in 10 American households uses a self-storage facility to store the overflow of their possessions.
- There are now 2.3 billion sq. feet of self-storage space in the United States; 7.3 sq. feet for every man, woman and child.

### 3. CATHOLIC FINANCIAL GIVING: WE DON'T MEASURE UP.

- The average American Catholic contributes 1% of gross income to his or her parish. This percentage has remained unchanged since the 1970s.
- In dollars, 1% equates to approximately \$6 per week contributed by the average Catholic to his/her parish.
- Main-line protestant (Lutheran, Episcopal, etc.) parishioners contribute 2%-3% of their gross income to their parishes.
- A study of giving by active parishioners, defined as those who attend services weekly and participate in one or more parish committees or ministries, listed Catholics as last among all denominations with annual giving among this group of \$1,300 per year.
- In 2002, moving Catholic giving from 1% to 2% would have meant an additional \$7 billion dollars to the American Catholic Church to support and grow parish ministries.

Looking at the financial and ministry needs in many of our parishes, it becomes clear that what we have done in the past to keep our parishes healthy and strong is no longer enough. The answer to many of the challenges our parishes face today lies in an age-old concept that Jesus began teaching us over 2000 years ago. The answer is faithful stewardship.

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“Parishioners must accept responsibility for their parishes and contribute generously - both money and service - to their programs and projects. The success or failure of parish programs, the vitality of parish life, or its absence, the ability or inability of a parish to render needed services to its members and the community, depend on us all.”

STEWARDSHIP: A DISCIPLE'S RESPONSE  
*U.S. Bishops' Pastoral Letter*

# *Why is Stewardship the Answer?*

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The principle of living stewardship is, at its core, very simple. God calls and we answer.

Answering God's call to practice good stewardship as a way of life, however, may sound like a warm and fuzzy platitude rather than a tangible solution to real world problems.

Successful stewardship parishes take practical steps; do solid planning, maintain clear and constant communication with parishioners, and practice sound development strategies – all within the context of faith.

Parishes that plan well and work hard to establish and nurture a stewardship culture, experience a remarkable up swell in the spiritual “attitude” of individuals, reflected throughout the parish community as a whole. This communal refocusing on the real meaning of good stewardship produces concrete, quantifiable benefits.

In a successful stewardship parish...

- Vitality and spirit are evident.
- Parishioner involvement is overflowing.
- Financial giving is proportionate; sufficient to support and increase ministries.
- Outreach increases.
- All parishioners, including newcomers, feel at home.

Examining the financial and ministry needs of many parishes, it is clear that our traditional approach to stewardship, at all levels, is not working. We have to start doing things differently.

Successful stewardship parishes recognize that establishing a stewardship culture does not happen overnight. It takes prayer, planning, commitment and effort. They continue the work of enhancing stewardship because it is the answer to reaching the ultimate goal; a spiritually vibrant, therefore financially secure parish.

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“Stewardship flowing from a personal and communal relationship to Christ holds a particular attraction to people. It is, ultimately, the pull and power of the Gospel come alive in our times and circumstances.”



## *Engaging Parish Leaders*

Successful stewardship parishes begin by engaging the Pastor and the Pastoral Council leadership in a conversation about a common vision for enhancing the parish stewardship culture. How parishioners respond to the stewardship message depends, in large part, on the commitment of these parish leaders.

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The response of parishioners to stewardship education, and to what will be asked of them as baptized Catholics, can be greatly influenced by the degree of importance the Pastor places on stewardship as a way of life.

### **BEST PRACTICES FOR A *Pastor* IN A STEWARDSHIP PARISH**

- Support publicly elements of the parish stewardship plan.
- Include stewardship themes in homilies throughout the year.
- Encourage the Pastoral Council, and other parish leadership groups, to read about and study stewardship.
- Utilize the resources, training and consulting services available from the Archdiocesan Office of Development & Stewardship.
- Help to select lay witnesses and assist with their training.

- Thank parishioners regularly for all they do to serve God and others.
- Pray that people in the parish will grow spiritually as a result of their embracing stewardship as a way of life.
- Make a personal commitment to stewardship as a way of life.
- Share stories of a personal stewardship journey.

## *Pastoral Staff*

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Since stewardship is intertwined through all ministries of the parish, the support of the pastoral staff plays an important role in the success of any stewardship plan. Staff members, working in partnership with the Stewardship Committee, can help facilitate various aspects of the parish stewardship plan.

### **BEST PRACTICES FOR A *Pastoral Staff* IN A STEWARDSHIP PARISH**

- **Director of Liturgy:** Incorporate elements of stewardship messaging into liturgies through intercessions, music, orders of worship, commissioning and blessings and meaningful stewardship commitment/recommitment opportunities.
- **Pastoral Associate:** Engage home-bound parishioners and others visited at home in a prayer initiative. Praying for the parish and its ministries is an invaluable gift, and the request underscores a message of the importance of every parishioner to the community.

- **Directors of Religious Education, Youth Ministry, Catechists and Day School Religion Teachers:** Blend stewardship education for children and youth into curriculum. Promote opportunities for children and youth to share their talents with the parish community.
- **Director of Administrative Services:** Create and maintain technological systems that allow the parish to communicate with parishioners, inviting the sharing of gifts and informing parishioners of how their gifts have been used to support the parish mission. Track individuals' financial support and volunteer involvement.
- **Parish Secretary:** Create a welcoming atmosphere in the parish office; establish/follow protocol for new parishioner registration including distribution of ministry/stewardship materials.

## *Pastoral Council*

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The Pastoral Council's commitment to a stewardship culture is as important as that of the Pastor. When stewardship is an integral part of the Pastoral Council vision, the work of all committees will flow from that vision.

### **BEST PRACTICES FOR A *Pastoral Council* IN A STEWARDSHIP PARISH**

- Spend time reading about and studying stewardship to more fully understand its meaning and focus.
- Form a Stewardship Committee to develop and implement a parish stewardship plan.

- Commit the parish to conducting annual stewardship renewal efforts of time, talent and financial resources.
- Commit the parish to conducting stewardship awareness efforts throughout the year.
- Facilitate stewardship conversations within, and among, standing committees.
- Ensure that the parish shows accountability for all gifts received.
- Publicly support all elements of the parish stewardship plan.

## *Parish Committees*

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While it is the Stewardship Committee's primary function to encourage the development of a stewardship culture in a parish, all committees have a role. A key component of stewardship is building a welcoming and caring community. This is not the role of one committee. All leadership groups, indeed all parishioners, share in this responsibility.

### **BEST PRACTICES FOR A *Ministry/ Activity Committee* IN A STEWARDSHIP PARISH**

- Create a warm, welcoming atmosphere.
- Develop a process to respond in a timely manner to parishioners willing to share their gifts.
- Make it a priority to thank those who share their gifts of time and talent.
- Create ministry "job descriptions."
- Develop on-going training and formation for parishioners involved in their areas of ministry.



## *The Stewardship Committee*

“**Stewardship.** This commission educates and promotes the giftedness of all parishioners and the responsibility of disciples to steward all resources. The members collaborate with pastor and staff to develop strategies and practices which invite all parishioners and the parish organization itself to share time, talent and treasure.”

Definition of the STEWARDSHIP COMMISSION  
Archdiocese of Milwaukee Parish Pastoral Council Norms  
Approved May 10, 2012 by Archbishop Jerome E. ListECKI

### *A successful Stewardship Committee/ Commission...*

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- ...is established as a Standing Committee/Commission of the Pastoral Council.
- ...is empowered to collaboratively develop a parish stewardship plan.
- ...is encouraged to engage parish leadership groups and committees to implement the stewardship plan.
- ...reflects the personality of the parish, including members from across parish demographics.
- ...engages in formation to develop a common understanding of stewardship, and of the mission and vision for the Stewardship Committee/Commission.



## *Responsibilities of the Stewardship Committee/ Commission*

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- Collaborate with the Pastor and Pastoral Council to develop a comprehensive parish stewardship plan.
- Shepherd the parish stewardship plan.
- Collaborate with committees and ministry leaders to incorporate stewardship messaging and practices through all areas of ministry.
- Design a “road map” for on-going stewardship education and formation.
- Develop and implement annual renewals of time, talent and financial resources.
- Create communications that highlight activities and individuals modeling stewardship as a way of life.
- Create ways to insure that all parishioners feel they are valued members of the community.

### PRAYER OF A STEWARDSHIP COMMITTEE

Most loving God, you have placed an important task before us.  
There will be challenges, which we will meet bolstered by Your strength.  
There will be decisions to make, which we will discern with Your guidance.  
There will be work to do, which we will accomplish fed by Your grace.  
We ask You to be with us as we continue this adventure in faith.  
Help us to see the great good that will be accomplished when we answer  
Your call to build the kingdom.  
We ask this through the intercession of Jesus, our Lord.

Amen.

**BEST PRACTICES IN**  
*Stewardship Committee/Commission*  
**FORMATION**

- Pray together – first.
- Study the U.S. Bishops’ Pastoral Letter, Stewardship: A Disciple’s Response.
- Assess the current parish situation with input from parish leadership groups.
- Develop a plan and **put it on paper**.
- Implement the plan, and assess your efforts regularly.
- Utilize resources and consulting services from the Archdiocese of Milwaukee.
- Communicate with neighboring parishes; What are they doing that is working – or not?
- Participate in learning opportunities offered by the Archdiocese, International Catholic Stewardship Council, etc.
- Pray together – always!

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“Do not let your hearts be troubled. You have faith in God;  
have faith also in me.”

JOHN 14:1

# *Community Building Activities*



It could be said that everything that happens in a parish is stewardship related. Planning on that scale, however, could overwhelm even the strongest Stewardship Committee! This booklet will highlight three “best practice” community building activities of every successful stewardship parish. Each activity serves more than one purpose and all three contribute to the fabric of a healthy stewardship parish.

These three steps can form the foundation of a fledgling stewardship plan, or they can inject new energy into an on-going stewardship effort:

- 1. Start a Welcoming Committee and implement a welcoming process.***
- 2. Hold a ministry/volunteer appreciation event.***
- 3. Develop an on-going lay witness program.***

## 1. WELCOMING NEW PARISHIONERS

First impressions are lasting impressions, therefore it is logical that welcoming and hospitality are at the top of the “best practices” list in a successful stewardship parish.

### **BEST PRACTICES IN** *Hospitality and Welcoming*

- **Form a Welcoming Committee.**

Parishioners active in this ministry should represent the varied demographics of the parish: single individuals, family groups, seniors, young adults, multi-cultural members, and others based on the makeup and personality of the individual parish. This membership diversity allows the committee flexibility to match newcomers with members who have similar “contact points” with parish ministries.

- **Develop a Welcoming Process.**

It is important to develop a process to ensure that new members are contacted, and welcomed, in a timely manner. The process can include a periodic “Welcome Sunday,” phone calls and/or home visits, or personal invitations to attend special events. Some parishes hold a special dinner for newcomers once or twice a year. At this event, members of the pastoral staff, and selected lay ministry leaders introduce themselves and give a very short presentation on their ministry, providing newcomers with a snapshot of parish life.

- **Be Creative!**

Find creative ways to be welcoming. One parish sent out free tickets for the annual all-parish dinner to families who had joined the parish in the 12 months prior to the event. The volunteers at the ticket table, instructed before the event, handed a yellow rose to those turning in a “newcomer’s pass”. Staff, Pastoral Council members and event leaders looked for the yellow roses, and were sure to introduce themselves and offer a personal welcome.

- **Design New Parishioner Welcome Packets/Materials.**

In a successful stewardship parish, the new parishioner packet includes more than a registration form, volunteer sign-up sheet and a financial support pledge card. This welcome packet provides one of the first opportunities to connect new parishioners with the mission, vision and ministries of the parish. Select additional packet components carefully. These additions should convey information, and the “feel” of the parish – without paper overload.

Unique components could include the latest parish directory, a prayer book or bible (inscribed with a welcome message from the pastor), or a parish recipe book. Include information that may be of special interest based on what you already know about the new member/family; a flyer about an upcoming youth service trip, an invitation to join the moms’ prayer group, men’s bible study or Teen Life program. Include free tickets to a parish fish-fry or pancake breakfast.

Above all, remember that the purpose of a newcomer’s welcome packet is not to impress new members with the “gift”, but rather to make new members feel at home in their new parish community.

- **Include Elements of a Public Welcome.**

Consider periodically asking new parishioners to stand at Mass for a blessing, include new members’ names in the bulletin or parish newsletter, consider posting pictures on a bulletin board.

## 2. MINISTRY APPRECIATION EVENTS

We can never say “thank you” often enough to those who share their talents with our parishes. Successful stewardship parishes have found ways to show their gratitude through events that increase the sense of community and underscore the wonderful faith-building experiences that can happen when parishioners work together in ministry.

## **BEST PRACTICES FOR** *Ministry “Thank You” Events*

- **Design an Event that Fits your Parish.**

Annual ministry appreciation events can take many forms, from coffee and donuts after Mass to a catered dinner – and everything in between. A potluck with dishes prepared and served by parish staff is easy on the parish budget and a lot of fun for the ministry volunteers. Parishes have served chili suppers and offered salad samplers or “build your own baked potato” bars. There are two basic rules to remember when planning your event: be creative, and plan within the scope of your resources.

- **Invite Everyone and Invite Often.**

Inviting everyone who serves in any ministry or volunteer capacity may seem obvious. Sometimes, however, we need to reinforce the message that service in one ministry, committee or group benefits the parish as a whole. Invite in varied ways at multiple times. Use the bulletin, parish newsletter, “kid-mail” packets in your school or Christian Formation programs, pulpit announcements and any other method available to you.

- **Appreciate the Appreciated.**

Take care that no volunteers are needed to “work the event”. Set-up, take-down, kitchen and serving duties should be handled by parish staff members. It’s not much of a “thank you” if the kitchen crew is working in the kitchen instead of enjoying the meal.

- **Add an Outreach Element.**

In some parishes, the “cost of admission” to the appreciation event is a can or two of food for the local community pantry, a gently used toy or warm winter coat. With the addition of an outreach element, the celebration of service to the parish also becomes an opportunity to serve the larger community.

### 3. THE POWER OF LAY WITNESS

We are all captivated by stories. Successful stewardship parishes utilize the power of lay witness (people sharing their personal faith stories) as an impactful component of the parish stewardship plan.

#### **BEST PRACTICES IN DEVELOPING A** *A Lay Witness Program*

- Use lay witness presentations throughout the year, not just during annual stewardship renewals.
- Share witness stories through every means available: from the pulpit, in print communications, as meeting reflections, etc.
- Identify lay witness candidates who are excited about their faith, relate well to others, have a compelling personal story to tell and are comfortable sharing their story with groups both large and small.
- Be open to witnesses from all demographics: youth, seniors, families, etc.
- Encourage lay witness candidates through personal invitation. Assure potential participants of your support as they go through the process and of your gratitude for their willingness to step forward.
- Mentor your lay witnesses. Advise those preparing to share their stories to pray and reflect on the blessings they have received. Encourage them to let the Holy Spirit guide their thoughts as they prepare.
- Be reassuring. A few encouraging words can work wonders!
- Encourage witnesses to focus their message on their faith journey, how the parish and its ministries play a role in their individual and/or family life.

- Sharing a personal story is meant as an inspiration, a cause for thoughtful consideration on the part of those hearing the witness talk. The speaker should focus on his or her story, rather than on what others “should do”.
- When in doubt, advise your witnesses to keep it simple. Short, sincere sharing is the most effective component of a witness presentation.
- Suggest that witnesses seek the advice of others who have given witness presentations. Input from someone who has had this experience can be very calming.
- Encourage participants to practice their witness talk out loud and in front of a mirror.
- Avoid surprises! Always ask your witnesses to share their talks with you in advance.
- Handle the details. Take care of the logistics; microphone, water for the speaker, etc.
- Encourage your witnesses to enjoy the experience, and be enthusiastic and sincere. After all, they are sharing a joyful message!
- Thank your witnesses – again.

While there are many ways to build a sense of belonging in a parish community, it is important to remember that communities are made up of individuals. As parishioners grow in their own understanding and practice of good stewardship, their parish communities will begin to experience the reinvigoration that comes when stewardship is embraced as a way of life.



*My Church*  
A STEWARDSHIP PRAYER

My church is composed of people like me.

I help make it what it is.

It will be friendly, if I am.

Its pews will be filled, if I help fill them.

It will do great work, if I work.

It will make generous donations to many causes,

if I am a generous giver.

It will bring other people into its worship and fellowship,

if I invite and bring them.

It will be a church of loyalty and love, of fearlessness and faith,

and a church with a noble spirit,

if I, who help make it what it is,

am filled with these same things.

Therefore, with the help of God,

I shall dedicate myself to the task of BEING

all the things I want my church to be.



## *Communications Strategies*

Effective communication plays a vital role in the success of any parish stewardship initiative. Well informed parishioners are more likely to become active parishioners – and active parishioners grow as faithful stewards.

### *The Annual Financial Report*

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Even though money should not be the main or the only focus for a parish stewardship initiative, an annual financial report is an important component of any successful stewardship plan. Parishioners want to be assured that the gifts they are being asked to share are being managed by the parish in a responsible and accountable manner. It is also important to demonstrate how the parish shares the financial gifts received through outreach to the broader community.

Annual financial reports in successful stewardship parishes take many forms, however they do share some common characteristics:

- Reporting is transparent. Parishioners appreciate getting an accurate picture of the parish financial situation.
- Reports are comprehensive, but produced with the average parishioner in mind. Spreadsheets that make perfect sense to the Finance Council may well confuse many others.
- Include some explanatory detail to demonstrate how the dollars received equate with ministry in action. Parishioners' financial gifts are given with the goal of impacting lives and ministries. The detail you provide can help parishioners see the impact of their collective generosity.

# *The Annual Pastoral Report*

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One of the most effective stewardship communications is an annual pastoral report. This report can be produced as a companion to the financial report, or as a stand-alone communications tool.

A pastoral report details ministry statistics (the number of baptisms, weddings, etc.), yet it communicates more than just numbers. Presented as what they truly are – ministry in action, the facts and figures come alive. This report is a very effective tool successful stewardship parishes use to accomplish an important goal – connecting parishioners with the mission, and ministries, of the parish. Through a pastoral report, we can inspire as well as inform. It is easy to see, and feel, the differences in the following examples:

## **Publishing statistics, we report:**

- 12 Baptisms
- 8 weddings
- 15 funerals
- 52 First Communions
- 67 Confirmations
- Etc....

**versus**

## **Sharing the Good News of How We Engage in Ministry**

- Celebrating with 12 families as we welcome newborn Catholics into our midst.
- Uniting 8 couples with each other, and with the Lord, in the sacrament of Matrimony.
- Praying with and comforting 15 grieving families as they commend their loved one into God's care.
- Forming 52 children and 67 teens as they prepare to receive sacraments.

A pastoral report draws a straight line from parishioners' financial contributions to faith in action. It is a joyful communication focusing on the real business of the parish; building the Kingdom through our service to God and to others.

“As with all things pertaining to the Gospel, stewardship is fundamentally the work of the Spirit in our lives...  
Wherever the Spirit works, there is joy.”

STEWARDSHIP: A DISCIPLE’S RESPONSE  
*U.S. Bishops’ Pastoral Letter*

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“Jesus beckons us. The joy we experience compels us to share it with others. We are not only disciples, we are evangelists.”

DISCIPLES CALLED TO WITNESS:  
THE NEW EVANGELIZATION  
*U.S. Bishops’ Pastoral Letter*

# *The Basics of Annual Stewardship Renewals*



Annual renewals of time, talent and financial support are staple activities in every successful stewardship parish. Annual recommitments inform and form parishioners over time, ultimately transforming individual lives and the life of the parish.

These activities provide systems and tools through which parishioners can make deliberate, prayerful commitments to taking an active role in supporting the parish and its ministries. Annual renewals also offer an opportunity for a parish-wide conversation on the meaning and practice of true stewardship.

## **BEST PRACTICES FOR THE ANNUAL RENEWAL OF *Time***

Before we can sincerely return a proportionate amount of our talents and financial resources to God, we must first give Him all of our hearts. Recognizing that true stewardship flows from each individual's personal relationship with the Lord, successful stewardship parishes are taking a fresh approach to the commitment of "Time."

This approach to the annual commitment of Time...

- ...recognizes that our personal relationship with God, like any other important relationship, must be actively tended if it is to grow stronger.
- ...invites and challenges parishioners to take the time necessary to think about how they can strengthen their connection to the Lord.

- ...encourages parishioners to make a deliberate, prayerful commitment, in writing, to spending time with the Lord by coming to Mass regularly, taking extra time for prayer, reading scripture, spending time on retreat, attending adoration, joining a prayer chain – or any number of other options based on parish or other offerings.
- ...can stand alone, or be done as a component of the annual renewals of talent or financial resources.
- ...provides a bridge for stewardship messaging during Lent or Advent.
- ...gives parishes the opportunity to remind parishioners that God wants to spend time with them, and gives parishioners a way to focus on that wonderful truth!

## **BEST PRACTICES FOR THE ANNUAL RENEWAL OF *Talent***

Ministry in parishes thrives, in large part, because of the countless talents shared by members of the faith community. Without the hands – and hearts – of parishioners many parish functions would be unable to continue.

In successful stewardship parishes the annual commitment of talent is positioned and communicated as an invitation to participate in ministry rather than a plea for more volunteers.

Components of an effective renewal of Talent:

- **A comprehensive ministry guide or booklet**  
This tool is an expanded version of the traditional volunteer sign-up form. Parish and committee resources may dictate the scope of this tool, but to be most effective, a ministry guide...

- ...should include as much information as possible such as:
- descriptions of each ministry/volunteer opportunity.
  - time commitments.
  - age parameters for participants.
  - contact information for committee/ministry leaders.
  - training requirements; Safeguarding God's Children, etc.
  - special ministry notes; "This ministry is perfect for families."
  - easy to complete reply forms.

- **A process for timely follow-up**

The ministry guide is complete. The response to commitment Sunday was more than everyone hoped for. Parishioners are interested and excited to offer their time in service, they have completed the reply form and they wait to be contacted so that they can actively participate. What happens next can make – or break – an effective renewal of talent.

Without timely follow-up, an effort to engage more parishioners in ministry will fall flat. Developing a contact process can be challenging, but it will be well worth the effort. In some parishes, a sub-committee of the Stewardship Committee is responsible for follow-up. Some parishes have a volunteer coordinator on staff and others partner with individual ministry leaders to accomplish timely follow-up.

Best practices for developing a follow-up process include:

- helping all committee/ministry leaders see the importance of timely follow-up.
- building a database that contains ministry/volunteer names and information.
- developing a realistic timeline for contacting interested parishioners.
- assigning contact responsibilities that are manageable.
- assuring parishioners, through the bulletin and other broad spectrum communications, that the parish is grateful for their willingness to serve, and that they will be contacted.

- **Additional components to enhance the renewal of Talent:**
  - Gift discernment process done in advance of the renewal
  - Commissioning/blessing at Mass
  - Ministry appreciation event
  - Celebration of Ministry event
  - Personal invitation; the most effective way to engage others
  - Saying “thank you” in every “talent” communication

## **BEST PRACTICES FOR THE ANNUAL RENEWAL OF *Financial Resources***

The majority of Catholics actively participate in ministry through financial support of their parish. An annual renewal of financial support benefits the parish by providing a basis for responsible planning. And, it provides the process and tools to encourage and enable parishioners to make a prayerful, proportionate financial commitment to their parish.

Components of an effective renewal of financial support include:

- Communications that connect parishioners’ financial support to parish ministry in action.
- Positive messaging: homilies, print material and letters that are transparent regarding the financial state of the parish, yet positive in tone.
- Solicitation letters that are personalized and segmented by giving level.
- Supplemental print materials; a pastoral report, ministry brochure, etc.
- Pledge cards that offer multiple giving options.
- A database that allows for entry of gifts and pledges for future use in sending thank you letters and pledge reminders, as well as giving analysis and financial reporting.
- Defined follow-up and “Thank you” processes.



Sample components of an enhanced offertory/annual renewal process, including variable timelines and communication options, are available through the Stewardship Toolbox on the Archdiocese of Milwaukee website ([www.archmil.org](http://www.archmil.org)) Parish Stewardship home page.

## *Commitment Weekends*

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The culmination of any renewal of time, talent or financial resources should be a commitment weekend. Successful stewardship parishes recognize that making a pledge to share our blessings has a natural place within liturgy.

- Parishioners should be encouraged to bring their commitment forms or pledge cards to Mass.
- The Stewardship and Liturgy Committees should work together to design a way to incorporate commitments into the offertory process, and to discuss ways to underscore stewardship messaging through music, Mass intentions, etc.
- Extra response forms or pledge cards should be made available.
- A message of gratitude, as each person reaches into his/her heart to respond in proportion to ability, should be consistently shared: homily, etc.

Commitment weekends that are well planned and executed provide a great springboard for on-going efforts to build a culture of stewardship in a parish.

Successful stewardship parishes frame the annual renewal of financial support within the broader message of stewardship as a faith response, rather than simply a financial transaction. These parishes also recognize that to be truly successful, annual renewals of financial support should never stand alone as the only “stewardship” activity in the parish.



## *The Best “Best Practices”*

The following “best practices” are critical components of every successful stewardship plan:

- **Pray**

Prayer is the cornerstone of good stewardship. Successful stewardship parishes encourage parishioners to pray as individuals and together as families. Every council and committee meeting begins with thoughtful prayer and/or reflection. Parishes ask prayer chain members to pray, on a regular basis, for the parish and its ministries. Prayer can not only move mountains, it can bring stewardship alive!

- **Begin**

Every successful stewardship parish starts somewhere. Large committees and complex plans are not always possible. Even a fledgling committee of 4 or 5 parishioners can have a positive impact on stewardship messaging and practice. If a parish community does not start the journey, however, its members may never fully embrace stewardship as a way of life.

- **Persevere**

One dictionary definition of “persevere” is: “persist steadily, usually over a long period of time, and especially despite problems or difficulties.” That definition says it all. Stewardship is a way of life that comes about through a conversion of hearts and minds, and conversion takes time.

The work of the Stewardship Committee has never been more important or urgently needed in the life of the Church. As faithful stewards, we trust in God, and trust that through prayer, planning, and perseverance, stewardship will become the spark that lights the fire of passion in a parish. Once ignited, that fire will burn brightly as good and faithful stewards share their gifts and work together to build up God’s kingdom.

“The way we came to know love was that He laid down his life for us; so we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers. Children, let us love not in word or speech but in deed and truth. “

1 JOHN, 3:16, 18

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“Being captured by gratitude is a wonderful ‘enslavement.’  
It will lead to joy and eventually to peace.”

A NEW HEART: ELEVEN QUALITIES OF HOLINESS  
*Bishop Robert F. Morneau*

# BEST PRACTICES

in a *Stewardship* Parish

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