

Why You Need Lay Witnesses for Parish Stewardship

Testimonies presented at Mass by individuals whose lives have changed as a result of stewardship is an important part of stewardship education. Stewardship is a part of the conversion process of our hearts that are evident in the Scriptures. The Old and the New Testaments are full of stories of real people who became aware of the need to put their faith into action.

Lay witnesses send a strong message to their fellow parishioners about giving of oneself and possessions in gratitude for what God has given them. The testimonials motivate those listening to bring stewardship into their own lives and they begin to realize they can have deeper relationship with God.

How to Select a Lay Witnesses

Here are some characteristics that make for a good lay witness candidate:

1. They should believe and practice stewardship - giving of their time, talent and treasure in an intentional, planned and sacrificial way.
2. They should also be individuals who can relate well to other parishioners, feel comfortable speaking to a group about their personal experiences, and be enthusiastic about their mission.

What happens when a person you think will be a good witness but declines to do so because it feels to them as if they are bragging? The response to that person could be, "You are not bragging because you are unselfish in your giving. By sharing with us how you arrived at your decision for stewardship, you will be testifying about the Lord and reaching out and touching individuals like yourself."

How to Prepare for a Lay Witness

1. Have the witness meet with your pastor or someone designated by the pastor, to discuss what should be included in the talk and how long it should be.
2. Read scriptural passages about stewardship
3. Prepare your personal remarks so you are comfortable with them. Use your own style, wording and delivery. Write out your talk word-for word. If you feel comfortable with the approach, use notes or key words to guide you through the presentation so it is more natural.
4. The pastor, or a person designated by the pastor, should approve the lay witness talk in advance.
5. Rehearse your talk aloud. It is preferred that you practice in the Church 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 and include everyone.
6. Be sincere, enthusiastic and friendly.

Lay Witness Talk - Helpful Hints

When planning your talk:

- Introduce yourself. Mention any ministries you are involved in.
- Be personal - share your testimony - your personal faith journey to stewardship and the deepened faith and joy that has resulted.
- Explain how stewardship means giving the first fruits, not the leftovers, e.g., when making your gift to the Church. ("First fruits" is a term from the Hebrew Scriptures, wherein the people brought the first share of their gifts, e.g., livestock, harvest, etc., to be shared with the community.) Returning the "first fruits" to God means placing the Church ahead of other interests.
- Include examples of how you balance your busy schedule - job, family and parish.

- Motivate people to become good stewards of time, talent and treasure, and show the many opportunities for this kind of stewardship that exist. (Parish Ministries listing)
- Do not be afraid to share your failings as well as your accomplishments in managing your time.
- Challenge people to reflect on their values and the importance of the Catholic faith in their lives as evidenced by how they use their gifts from God.
- Challenge them with practical questions. As they receive increases do they, in turn, increase their gift to the Lord? This increase enables the ministries to continue to grow.
- Stress the role of the commitment form and emphasize that its return is a sign of participation and commitment.

Include the following explanation in regard to completing the commitment form in your talk:

- **If your parish mails the brochure and commitment/pledge card tell them:** “Soon you will receive a commitment form in the mail. The commitment form will include opportunities for commitments of time in prayer (to pray and attend Mass regularly and financial giving to our parish. **If the parish does NOT mail but hands out the brochure, volunteering opportunities/ministry listings and commitment card at the masses** on Commitment Sunday then ask the ushers to pass these communication pieces out along with pens to complete the card.
- Everyone is important and everyone has something to give back to our parish and diocesan communities, whether it be visiting the sick or reading at Mass. [YOUR PARISH] belongs to you, and the growth and vitality of this parish depends on you. Don't limit your parish involvement to attendance at Sunday liturgy.
- Review and complete the commitment/pledge card and place it in the collection. Even if you are currently involved in a ministry, renew that commitment by completing the form.
- The commitment card is confidential and is not legally binding. What the commitment card will do is help our parish to plan for the future. The Parish understands you have multiple philanthropic priorities. A current Catholic interpretation of a biblical tithe is

giving 5% of their income to the parish, 1% to the diocese and 4% to other charities. Tell them if they can't do the full 5 percent to their parish, ask them to take a step towards this goal. Please complete the form and return it in the offering. Thank you.