

Lay Witness Preparation

2021 Bishop's Annual Stewardship Appeal

Sample Outline

1. Introduce yourself

While many of your fellow parishioners will know you, some may not. Give a description of your family, the number of years in the parish, etc.

2. Properly define Christian stewardship

Christian stewardship is a response we make in gratitude to God for what He has given to us. It is a deliberate, conscious decision to commit overall to the fundamentals of Christian stewardship: prayer, family life, sharing skills and talents, and giving financially to your parish.

3. Discuss how you began practicing Christian stewardship

When did you first become aware of the concept? Did you have reservations? Be honest about your first reactions. People 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?

4. Share when you began to experience the benefits

Speak of the effect that Christian stewardship has had on your faith life. Use anecdotes from your own family life if possible. How do you and your family practice stewardship?

5. Urge your fellow parishioners to get involved

Invite the congregation to join you and your family in making your parish a stewardship parish. Ask them to look at all that God has given to them and discern how they can make a generous response to His many gifts.

Feel Free to talk about how you have witnessed the Church's response to the great need, especially in the past year.

Tips for Presenting

An important part of accepting the concept of Christian stewardship is the personal witness and individual testimony you provide with your presence, as well as the way you give your talk. The following are tips you should consider in preparing your comments:

- 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 your presentation so that it is more natural.
- For you to give a good presentation, it is best to rehearse your talk aloud. Reading it silently will not 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.
- Make sure that the pastor sees a copy of your remarks and offers feedback and/or suggestions.
- Nervousness can make your throat dry. If you think this may happen, have a glass of water in an unobtrusive place and take a sip if needed.
- Above all, be sincere, enthusiastic, and friendly.
- If time permits and any of the following “fit” into your talk, please include them:
 - Emphasize that Christian stewardship begins with gratitude to God for all His gifts — in other words, an energetic prayer life
 - Explain that Christian stewardship means giving of the “first fruits,” not what is left over.
 - Talk about the personal need of each Christian to give of their time, talent, and treasure.
 - Stress, “Many of you know from your own giving experience that what I have told you is true.” (In thanks to those who are already generous)
 - Stress the sense of joy and fulfillment that comes to those who give God the first share of their time, talent, and treasure as a way of expressing their gratitude and trust in God.
 - Talk about intentional, planned, and proportionate giving. Explain what it means to you to give from your substance, not what is just “leftover.”

Lay Witness Template Presentation

There seems to be a trend of “paying it forward.” Whether it’s at a coffee shop, in the drive thru line, at a gas station, or the grocery store – seeing, hearing about, or being a recipient of these acts of kindness make us smile. We get a good feeling when we do something nice or kind for someone; or even when we just hear about the excitement and goodwill these experiences create. It is evident that we want to participate, to be a part of the joy shared.

Today, I’m here to speak to you about sharing with others the way Christ calls us to live; something called Stewardship. Stewardship is defined in many ways. Most of us hear the word stewardship and associate it with our gifts of Time, Talent, and Treasure. But that definition shares very little about the spirituality of stewardship and what happens to us when we chose to embrace it as a “way of life.” Being a Christian steward means so much more. As Christian stewards, we receive God's gifts gratefully, cultivate them responsibly, share them lovingly with others, and return them with increase to the Lord.

We are each being invited to give to our Bishop’s Annual Stewardship Appeal. As One Faith, One Family, we will all be asked to make a pledge to support our seminarians, Catholic Charities, Catholic education, evangelization efforts, and to assist our senior priests. It can be a struggle to share when there is no visible excitement or challenge, and the request to give seems remote. Many times, we respond hesitantly, or out of a sense of obligation. I’m asking you to take time today and remember that feeling you get when you embrace the spirit of giving to others, the joy you experience when you do something to help a stranger, someone other than yourself, your family, or a friend. Challenge yourself to make a pledge even though you may never meet the recipient of your gift to the Appeal, or personally see the impact on their lives. You will experience God’s grace and His love when you live His commandment to “love our neighbor as our self.” It is *then* you will find the spirituality of stewardship, and God’s response to our gift; a deeper faith and closer relationship with Him.

We should all give to our own parish, and support our Pastors, the ministries, and work we do as a parish community; but if your circumstances allow, we should also support the work of our diocese, the vocations and ministries that serve to build the kingdom of God as part of the greater Church.

I can personally witness to the joy of stewardship in my own life....

< A personal statement can be added here. This should be 3-4 sentences, a statement about the impact of stewardship in your life, how it has brought you closer to God. >

Have you experienced the joy of giving thankfully to God a portion of all you have been blessed with? Thank you for listening, and letting me share with you today.

Lay Witness Sample Presentation

Hello, my name is _____ and my wife and I have been parishioners at _____ for over 15 years. If you asked me a few years ago if my wife and I were quote-unquote, good Catholics, I would have said, "Well, yes, of course!" It wasn't until we read *The Four Signs of a Dynamic Catholic*, by Matthew Kelly, and learned that ultimately, only about 7% of all Catholics are truly engaged in the Church, that we realized we had some work to do. We thought that surely we were in that 7 percent! We both grew up as cradle Catholics. We attended Sunday Mass, prayed before meals, and made sure our kids received the sacraments, and tried to engage with them about what they were learning during religious education. We felt pretty good about all of that!

In his book, Matthew Kelly suggests that the four signs of a dynamic Catholic are having a daily commitment to prayer, regularly seeking out ways to be formed in the faith, being generous not only with money, but with our lives, and actively sharing the faith with others. We realized that our prayer was spontaneous, not made a priority in our daily routines. We weren't trying to become better formed in the faith, only doing the bare minimum at best. We gave, but it wasn't intentional. And we were not taking any steps towards sharing the faith. This sparked a discussion with my wife and me. We wanted to move from the 93% of disengaged Catholics and make the effort to have a positive impact on our Church, even if it was small, to increase that 7% statistic.

It was found that "dynamic Catholics" believe that generosity most often begins financially, because attachment to money and things are such common roadblocks to our spiritual growth. God is so generous, and we are called to live like Him. This might explain why the happiest people are often, the most generous people. We have a need to give!

Together, we made the decision that we needed to take practical steps towards becoming more dynamic Catholics. There are many simple things that can be done, and if we can do it, you can do it, too. First, we started scheduling prayer into our days, literally writing it in our calendars, beginning with just ten minutes a day. Second, we began discerning how God might be calling us to use our talents within the parish, allowing us to become integrated into the community and better equipped to share the faith. For me, it was joining the Knights of Columbus, and my wife participates in Christ Renews His Parish. Finally, we took a leap into intentional, financial giving. We were capable of giving more but were reluctant to do so. It's true, grasping on to money and material things got in the way of our spiritual growth and trust in God. It was a stumbling block for us.

It can be difficult to describe the graces that come from intentionally practicing stewardship as a way of life. Simply put- it's freeing. Once we recognized that everything is a gift, it became easier to give of ourselves out of gratitude. Embarking on this new mission as dynamic Catholics has opened our hearts to experience the joy of generosity within our family. It's a fantastic mission, and I pray you will join us by challenging yourselves to truly embrace stewardship and help us increase the percentage of dynamic Catholics, or good stewards, in our parish and in our diocese.