



A Guide for the  
Stewardship Lay Witness

Diocese of Charlotte

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## **Introduction**

Stories—we are all captivated by stories. Magazines and newspapers are always looking for good human-interest stories. Every good homilist or preacher includes a story. I was privileged to hear the late Archbishop Murphy's last talk on stewardship at the Northwest Regional Stewardship Conference in Seattle. 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, too, used stories to teach others. And finally, the Gospel writers, through their own stories that witness to their lives with Jesus, still bring about life-changing conversions to millions of people—now 2000 years later. Everyone can identify some moment when the life-story of another brought about a change for the better in their own life. It might be a major conversion or just an attitude adjustment, but it made a difference in how you live your own life. Archbishop Murphy's story made hundreds of people become regular blood-donors.

***Far from "tooting our own horn," every time we share our own story we are witnessing to the generosity of a loving God. It is one of the most powerful and effective means of presenting the stewardship message. Properly prepared, it has the potential of changing peoples' lives.***

### **Role of the Lay Witness**

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 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.

### **Sample Outline for composing Lay Witness Talk**

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** - It is a response we make in gratitude to God for What He has 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? 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?
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 our time and talent? Where 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 your parish a stewardship parish. Ask them to look at all that God has given to them and make a generous response to his many gifts.

### **Tips for Presenting a Lay Witness Talk**

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:

- 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.
- For you to give a good presentation, it is best for you 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.
- If you are doing a renewal, ask the person who did the talk last year to listen to your talk and make suggestions from their experience. Ask the pastor to listed to you deliver your talk in the church and offer suggestions.
- 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.
- Above all, be sincere, enthusiastic and friendly.

### **Some Do's and Don't for the Lay Witness**

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

- Explain that stewardship means giving of the "first fruits," not what is left over
- Talk about the personal need of each Christian to give back in gratitude.
- Say "Many of you know from your own giving experience that what I have told you is true." (Acknowledging that you are not in this alone.)
- Stress the sense of joy and fulfillment that comes to those who give God the first share of the 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.
- Emphasize that it is important to give all three "time, talent and treasure".
- Explain that stewardship involves not only church (parish and diocese); it also includes community

## DON'T

- talk in bargaining terms (e.g. “I gave this much time or treasure and God gave me this in return.”)
- Stress church needs or budgets.
- Talk in dollar or time amounts: “If everyone could give \$10 a week”...”we need \$2 more a week”...”give our fair share”...”if everyone could give 3 hours per week”
- Use threats of possible consequences stemming from the failure to give: “We won’t be able to heat or air-condition the church”...”We’ll have to close the school”.
- Suggest that Parish Stewardship is 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. Your sharing your spiritual journey with others members of your parish family is a unique gift and a true statement of your commitment to stewardship. You are showing your gratitude by this sharing. Thank You.*

### Getting Started ...and Ending Up

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. We are parishioners here at St. Kunagunda’s along with our three children, Manny, Moe and Jack. We’d like to share with you what stewardship means to our family and how it has affected our lives...”

The following is a suggested closing paragraph: “As we continue with our liturgy this morning (evening), and our gifts are brought forward, let each of us ask ourselves if this gift of our treasure which we offer today, is truly a measure of the gratitude we have for what we have been given. Let us look at what we give to our church and the community in terms of time and service, and ask ourselves if this, also, is proportionate to God’s gifts to us. 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 when we give generously and trust in His love.

### Sample Lay Witness Talks

Download the entire Stewardship Manual from our diocesan website at <http://www.charlottediocese.org/stewardship.html> . There are several sample Lay Witness talks in the manual.