Witness to Stewardship as a Way of Life

(Stewardship Speaking Points/Guidelines)

Maybe it's your worst nightmare. Maybe it's your most closely-held held dream. You have been asked to speak in your parish about stewardship. What will you say? Where do you start?

The outline below may give you some direction, some guidance or just some ideas. Please use whatever portions are helpful to you.* For additional resources or assistance, contact Glenda Seipp at the Stewardship Office, by phone at 442-5820 or by email at gseipp@diocesehelena.org.

Three Important Points to Make

1. Define stewardship as a way of life

Describe the full nature of our giftedness as children of God—beginning with time, talent and treasure but also including our lives, relationships, vocations, the environment, even our obstacles, weaknesses and mistakes.

2. Affirm that your audience members are already good stewards

Good parenting is good stewardship, so is regularly receiving the Sacraments, giving blood, participating in parish ministries and school and community groups, charitable giving to the poor, church and other causes, making time for God and for family a priority, and so on.

3. Challenge the audience to live stewardship daily in all facets of life

Ask them to make a conscious decision to develop and share their gifts on an everyday basis. Remind them that, for the true Christian disciple, stewardship is not a duty or obligation but a response and an opportunity.

Stewardship Themes

What do we mean by "stewardship"?

A Christian steward recognizes God as the source of all, and knows that we will be held accountable for how we used the gifts he entrusted to our care.

Stewardship is biblically based. It is as old as the Old Testament and an integral part of our faith today. According to the 1992 USCCB Pastoral Letter on Stewardship, a Christian steward is: "One who receives Gods 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."

The title of the 1992 USCCB Pastoral Letter, "Stewardship: A Disciple's Response", conveys that first, God is generous to us. Then, we respond with gratitude. Action is required. The letter points out that "stewardship is an expression of discipleship"; it is not an option for Catholics.

Our Giftedness

We are each and all uniquely gifted by God in a variety of ways. Owning up to those gifts, especially talents and abilities, is not prideful or egotistical but true humility when we credit God with our gifts and put them in His service.

Our unique gifts include our very lives and the time we have been given, our faith and the Church, our relationships, our work and vocations, our abilities and interests, experiences and passions, our intellects and personalities, our money and possessions, the environment and our citizenship, even our obstacles, weaknesses and mistakes.

Once we realize how generous God has been to us, we respond with gratitude by developing all our gifts to their full potential, using them well to serve others, building up the kingdom of God, and sharing them generously in proportion to what we have been given.

Gratitude, Responsibility, Generosity and Accountability

There are just four measurements of good stewardship—regardless of the type of stewardship in question: gratitude, responsibility, generosity and accountability.

So, for instance, we might ask ourselves such questions as: Do I give of my talent while I credit God for making me talented? Am I wisely responsible with my time? Am I ungrudgingly generous with my treasure? Am I accountable in stewardship of the land and water?

Each of us is responsible for how we live our lives, responding to the particular circumstances of the life God gave each of us. Scripture tells us, the Lord loves a cheerful giver. Our generosity should be unconditional and our gifts gladly offered. At some point each of us will be asked to give an accounting of how we used the gifts God entrusted to our care--how we responded to God's generosity in our lives.

Obstacles to Stewardship as a Way of Life

Fear that if we share our time, we won't have enough to do what we want to do.
Fear that if we give our money away, we won't have enough to buy what we want for our loved ones and ourselves.
Fear that if we offer our talents, they won't be good enough to meet our expectations.
Fear that if we love without strings, we won't receive enough love in return, etc.
Our consumer-driven society tells us we will never have "enough" --that we will always have to buy more, do more, be more.

Christian Stewardship is counter-cultural. It has been called the "antidote to materialism". We Christians believe that God gave each of us "enough." That is, exactly what we need to fulfill the plan he has for us.

Collectively too, we know we have been given "enough" if we share with one another! No matter how small or limited our gifts seem, if we share them generously God will make what we offer "enough", just as Jesus did when he took the few loaves and fishes and made it "enough" to feed the multitudes!

Stewardship is a call to discern our wants from our needs, a call to simplicity, a call to prioritize our lives so we spend our precious time and resources on what is truly important. Stewardship is our faith lived out in our daily lives. We must have faith that God will always provide what we need and faith that we can live a disciple's life as he calls us and faith that when we fail because of our human weaknesses, still he will be there to provide comfort, to lift us up and help us to try again.

Time, Talent and Treasure

No matter what our position in life or how many demands are put on us, all of us have exactly the same number of hours available in each day. Making good use of that time requires keeping our priorities straight. Since our time is limited, each time we say 'yes' to one thing, we are forced to say 'no' to something else. We need to make sure our highest priorities get the 'yes'.

A simple but profound way to be a good steward of God's gift of time is to attend Mass regularly and to establish a good prayer life. Even those in your audience who may feel they don't have the means to contribute in any other way can still pray for the needs of the Church, the world, their community and individual members of the community.

We need not excel at something to be talented. Instead of asking "Will you volunteer?" ask "How will you use your gifts to serve others?" A volunteer can say yes or no, but as baptized disciples/followers of Jesus Christ, we are called to use our gifts to serve others and build up the kingdom of God. We are his hands and feet, eyes and ears, mind and heart in the world.

Christian stewardship shows us that everything comes from God, including our wealth and the ability to create our wealth. Letting go of some of what is really only on loan to us anyway is very freeing. It allows us to follow the teachings of Jesus more closely.

Being a good steward of the money and possessions God entrusts to our care requires that we honestly discern our needs from our wants. God always provides what we need, but seldom everything we want.

If we don't make a deliberate plan to return the "first fruits" we receive from God back to him after taking care of our own needs and many of our selfish wants, we will only have what is leftover for God. This is why making an annual plan is important to the charitable giving aspect of our discipleship. Sometimes people ask what a "minimum" gift is. But why should we even consider a minimum obligation to the God who has given us everything? While our God cannot be outdone in generosity, we at least need to share with others out of profound gratitude and love for God. To make your gift sacred, or sacrificial, it should be enough to make a difference in your lifestyle. Don't "give 'til it hurts," give until it feels good!

Getting Ready

1. Know your audience

Find out approximately how many people will be present. Will you be an “insider” or an “outsider” relative to the group? What does this audience already know about the topic of stewardship? How long can you speak before your audience will lose interest? What is the context of the presentation (i.e. after the homily, at a stewardship meeting, etc.)?

2. Know your topic

Research, research, research! There are many excellent resources available through the Diocese of Helena and others. Learn the pastor or your hosts’ expectations.

What are the potential “hot spots” surrounding this topic in this location? How can you effectively address them? How does this topic directly impact your audience? Is there a specific outcome desired, (i.e. people will be asked to make a commitment of some sort)?

3. Structure your speech

Use the “tell me” model: tell me what you’re going to say, tell it to me, then tell me what you told me. Three is a magical number. Group things in threes, make three points, have three main parts to your presentation. Groups of three are more easily remembered and re-told. Be sure your speech progresses logically from an introduction to a preview to the body of the speech to a summary and conclusion. Tie the introduction and conclusion together if possible.

When you practice your speech, time yourself so that you know how long the actual speech will be. Shorten it or lengthen it according to the time you have been allotted.

4. Be mentally prepared

There are three elements of mental preparedness: confidence, conviction and credibility. Your confidence will be high if you have done your homework and are well prepared. Practice makes perfect. Practice your speech several times, in front of a mirror, a video camera or a friend who can offer constructive criticism.

Your conviction will be high if you take care to speak only from your own experience, knowledge and understanding. Stick to what you know and then speak with the authority that knowledge gives you. Personal experiences and personal witness are very effective so use them to clarify and explain. Don’t skip these personal anecdotes in your practice sessions. They will add to the length of your speech and the telling of personal stories may bring up emotions you don’t expect.

Confidence and conviction will give you credibility. However, enhance your credibility by asking your host to introduce you with a little information about you and why you have been asked to speak.

5. Account for the physical environment

Even if you are speaking at an informal, evening or weekend workshop, your appearance should be neat, and well groomed. For more formal occasions, such as Mass, dress in a professional way minimizing anything that will be distracting like a loud tie or flashy jewelry. Your body language will also convey your confidence, conviction and credibility. Stand up straight. Make eye contact as much as possible. Smile. Speak loudly enough to be heard in the back. If there is a microphone, position it to be just below your mouth at chin level and about two or three inches away.

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