



PARISH VITALITY
& STEWARDSHIP

Time & Talent Campaign Kit: **Lay Witness Speaker's Guide**



Archdiocese
of Toronto

Office of Formation for Discipleship
www.archtoronto.org/stewardship

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Let us begin with a stewardship prayer:

*Loving God, I come to you in thanksgiving,
knowing that all I am and all that I have is a gift from you.
In faith and love, help me to do your will.
I am listening, Lord God.
Speak your words into the depth of my soul,
that I may hear you clearly.
I offer to you this day all the facets of my life,
Whether it be at home, at work, or at school—
to be patient, to be merciful, to be generous, to be holy.
Give me the wisdom and insight
to understand your will for me
and the fervour to fulfill my good intentions.
I offer my gifts of time, talent and possessions to you
as a true act of faith,
to reflect my love for you and my neighbour.
Help me to reach out to others as you, my God,
have reached out to me.
Amen.*

Dear Reader,

Thank you for sharing your God-given gifts with your parish community in the form of a lay witness talk. It is a noble endeavor to invite other parishioners to get more involved in the life of your parish for the enrichment of all.

Belonging to the mystical body of Christ, we are all called to serve in the Lord's vineyard to the best degree of our ability. As in the parable of the talents, no one is left out, either from the work in the vineyard or the judgement and joyous reward we hope to receive when the master returns to ask what we have done with our God-given gifts (Matthew 25: 14-30 and Luke 19: 11-27). There are many talents present in a parish community, and all of these have their special place. Just as God does not create useless things, so too parishioners do not have useless talents that the parish cannot benefit from. Many people simply do not realize they can be more involved in parish life. They need to be invited.

Your lay witness talk is an important part of that invitation.

Your talk will provide witness to the stewardship way of life, which is counter-cultural to what people have been indoctrinated with in our modern age, the spirituality of "Me". Your talk is one facet in a parish's mission to a stewardship way of life to show people that the order of priority that God intended for us is to be firstly ordered towards Him, secondly to our neighbour, and then, finally, to oneself.

The more involved people become in your parish, the more vibrant it will grow. This vibrancy is attractive to outsiders. People who visit your parish will see a loving, active Christian community which they will want to be a part of. Your gifts, multiplied by the gifts of others and blessed by God will help to renew the Church.

So let's get started!

The Spirituality of Stewardship



Understanding the spirituality of stewardship will help you to put your lay witness talk into the proper context. We recommend you pause reading this guide now and watch this short video with Cardinal Thomas Collins on the Spirituality of Stewardship. To watch the video visit: <http://bit.ly/CardinalsMessage>

Now that you have watched the video, we can talk more about the three gifts from God contained within stewardship. These three gifts are time, talent and treasure.

Of the three gifts, time is arguably the most important as we only have a limited amount of time in this world. Cardinal Collins in his Pastoral Letter on Stewardship said, “Our lives are woven out of time, and my stewardship of the scarce resource of time truly reveals what I really consider to be important. Every day has 24 hours, and time once past will never come again. I must constantly choose how to spend my time, for once this moment is past it is not my time any more.” The way in which we give of our time says a lot about who we are and what we consider important.

The second God-given gift we have with respect to stewardship is our talent. Like the three servants who were entrusted with ‘talents’ by the master in the stewardship parable (Matthew 25: 14-30 and Luke 19: 11-27), God gives us gifts to share with others to build up the kingdom of God. Talents (in today’s world) has come to be commonly known as those unique gifts bestowed by God upon the individual person. Some people are very good

communicators, others empathetic, some are very good with their hands, others are great teachers, or are creative, while some are blessed with a beautiful singing voice. Based on our talents and the interest that flows from them, we often pursue learned skills to match. Learned skills can include photography, accounting, playing an instrument, website design, medical knowledge, etc. These gifts can be used exclusively either for one’s own selfish gain, or can be generously shared for the benefit of others.

Cardinal Collins in his pastoral letter says “As good stewards, we are meant to use God’s gift fruitfully and creatively, so that with true gratitude for what we have received we may return God’s gifts to Him with increase. If we truly have the spirit of stewardship, we will not let God’s gifts go to waste, and we will not selfishly cling to them, but use them generously to serve others, and in so doing give glory to God. That is the point of stewardship.”

For the purposes of this guide, we will not be talking about the treasure component of stewardship (donating money). While treasure is important, the focus of your talk should be about inviting people to share their God-given gifts with the parish community.

The Spirituality of Stewardship (Continued)

A good steward has the proper relationship with their God-given gifts in relation to God, neighbour, and self. When these relationships are all in their proper place, a good steward becomes someone who receives God's gifts gratefully, develops those gifts responsibly, shares those gifts lovingly in justice with others, and makes a return with interest to the Lord. Once someone truly recognizes that everything they are and all that they have is a gift from God, thanksgiving emerges to solicit a personal response of self-giving from the disciple. As such, conversion is an important part of stewardship. People who wish to live out their gratitude in an authentic way will naturally respond to an invitation to share their God-given gifts with their parish community, in thanksgiving to God.

With respect to the sharing of our time and talent, it is important to note the difference between “shallow stewardship” and “deep stewardship”. Shallow stewardship may see the sharing of our time and talent as a heavy burden born only out of a sense of guilt, a grumbling obligation, or for some (depending on the defect we struggle with) an opportunity to bring attention or glory only to oneself. Deep stewardship, on the other hand, is the result of a deeper conversion from which flows the gift of self for the glory of God in service of our neighbour.

If we place God and neighbour before ourselves, joy accompanies self-giving, even when the cross is presented to us along the way (e.g. when we are tired and do not feel like working on the talk, or overhear someone saying our talk, once delivered, was not very good, etc.). Despite some of the little crosses that the Lord may choose to send our way as we prepare and deliver our talk, try to keep in mind that God loves a cheerful giver (2 Corinthians 9:7). As such, we should try to “put the love into it”, so to speak, and offer up any contradictions that may come our way and leave the rest to God. Overcoming ourselves, in cooperation with grace, is a wonderful opportunity to grow in virtue and holiness. Your talk is an opportunity to imitate Christ and is inherently fruitful.



Cardinal Collin's Pastoral Letter on Stewardship

At this time, we suggest you pause and read Cardinal Collins' Pastoral Letter on Stewardship. It is a fairly short and easy to read document with many spiritually enriching insights and will help you with your talk.

Cardinal Collins' Pastoral Letter on Stewardship can be found here: <https://bit.ly/3pUgRdy>

The Importance of Personal Witness

To help you with the writing of your talk, we have recorded a webinar called, “The Power of Personal Witness” with Dr. Josephine Lombardi, Associate Professor, Systematic and Pastoral Theology and Assistant Dean for Academic Affairs for St. Augustine’s Seminary.

IMPORTANT! As you watch the webinar, please keep in mind that your talk should focus on your experiences in parish ministry specifically. The purpose of your lay witness talk is to invite people to consider joining a parish ministry of their own, based on the amount of time they can give matched to the particular talents God has given them. Remember, they may be interested in joining a different ministry than the one you are serving in, so please consider this when extending the invitation during your talk.



Please pause reading this guide now and watch the webinar, which can be found here: <https://bit.ly/PVWS-VideoMay2021>

Now that you have watched the webinar, here are some key points from Dr. Lombardi’s presentation slides for your reference (our italics are an addition to the original text on Dr. Lombardi’s presentation slides):

1. The first form of evangelization is witness.
 - Witness refers to witnessing something, hearing something, or experiencing something. The experience leads to an encounter, transformation, conversion, and sharing.
2. We are meant to be generous with our experiences with others so that they may also be open to conversion. The experience that you share must reveal something about God’s activity in your life and the fruit of that activity (*with respect to parish ministry*).
3. Remember boundaries when preparing a lay witness talk - safe disclosure vs. unsafe disclosure. Ask permission to share personal stories/change names if necessary.
4. Practice, practice, practice.
5. Keep in mind the Lombardi Method:
 - Journal spiritual activity and fruit of the encounter to Christ.
 - Scripture selection (*consider using our suggested list in the upcoming section: Writing Your Lay Witness Talk, point 3. Referencing and rooting your talk in Scripture*).
 - Choose an encounter and recall (*In this case, a memory from your time in parish ministry*).
 - Consult a biblical commentary (*we recommend reading Cardinal Collins’ Pastoral letter on Stewardship for the appropriate context for your talk*).
 - Describe your encounter with Christ (*in light of parish ministry*).

Final Tips:

- **Avoid technical language/theology.**
- **Know your audience** (*in this case, it is your parish community*).
- **Monitor your bodily and facial movements** (*pre-tape yourself for review and ask for feedback*).
- **Communicate with joy.**
- **Unless you are a professional public speaker and have memorized your presentation, use a prepared text.**
- **10-15 minutes** (*time yourself*) **3-4 pages 12 pt font, double spaced.** (*Important! The time allocation may have to be much shorter as you are in a parish setting. Ask your pastor how long your talk should be and adapt.*)
- **Do not rush, speak clearly, pause and smile.**
- **Consider your future self.**
- **Ask your pastor to review your prepared text for approval.**

Writing Your Lay Witness Talk

Your lay witness talk can help inspire people to become active stewards in your parish community. The following elements can be used as a framework for your talk (an example of a lay witness talk using this framework will follow after this section):

- Opening Remarks.
- Speaking about how stewardship (the sharing of your God-given gifts) has personally affected you.
- Referencing and rooting your talk in scripture.
- Inviting people to join the stewardship way of life.

1. Opening remarks

Begin your talk by sharing with people who you are, how long you have been in the parish, and what your topic will be. You may introduce your topic by:

- Sharing with people how you felt when you were asked to speak on stewardship.
- Defining stewardship. (Stewardship is recognizing that everything we have is a gift from God, taking time to be grateful for those gifts, and returning the best portion of those gifts to God by sharing His gifts with others – understanding that God invites us all to share.)
- OR perhaps begin by asking a question to the people in the form “we”.
 - Do we give from our “first fruits” to God or from what is leftover?
 - If God were to ask us today, “What have we done with the gifts I have given you?” How would we respond? etc.

2. Speaking about how stewardship (the sharing of your God-given gifts) has personally affected you

People are drawn in by compelling personal testimony. Your testimony will bring the idea of stewardship down to earth, making it real and tangible to the listener. Your witness could include any of the following:

- How and when you first realized the importance of stewardship.
- How stewardship impacts your daily life at home, at work, or in the parish.
- What joys have you experienced because of your active involvement in the parish?
- Challenges to your stewardship (it is okay to say that sometimes stewardship is hard!)
 - If you reach a stagnation point while writing your lay witness talk, do not worry, this may be a good opportunity to explore this frustration and see if your path in stewardship has not also had some bumps in the road. These may be valuable to talk about because people resonate with real-life stories. Nothing is perfect in this life. As such, stewardship takes time and has its challenges along the way. Sharing these challenges and how you overcame them can be a source of inspiration.

Writing Your Lay Witness Talk (Continued)

3. Referencing and rooting your talk in scripture

Stewardship is not a new idea your parish invented; being a steward is a concept that is as old as Sacred Scripture. Your stewardship talk can include a reference to Sacred Scripture to help parishioners understand stewardship is not your idea, but a calling from the Lord.

Consider selecting a scripture passage from the list below that speaks to you. If you have not already read Cardinal Collins' Pastoral Letter on Stewardship (and in lieu of a biblical commentary), you may want to read it now to help you put the passages into the proper context. The Pastoral Letter on Stewardship can be found here: <https://bit.ly/3pUgRdy>

While there are many others you could choose, here are some suggested scripture passages that are frequently cited for stewardship:

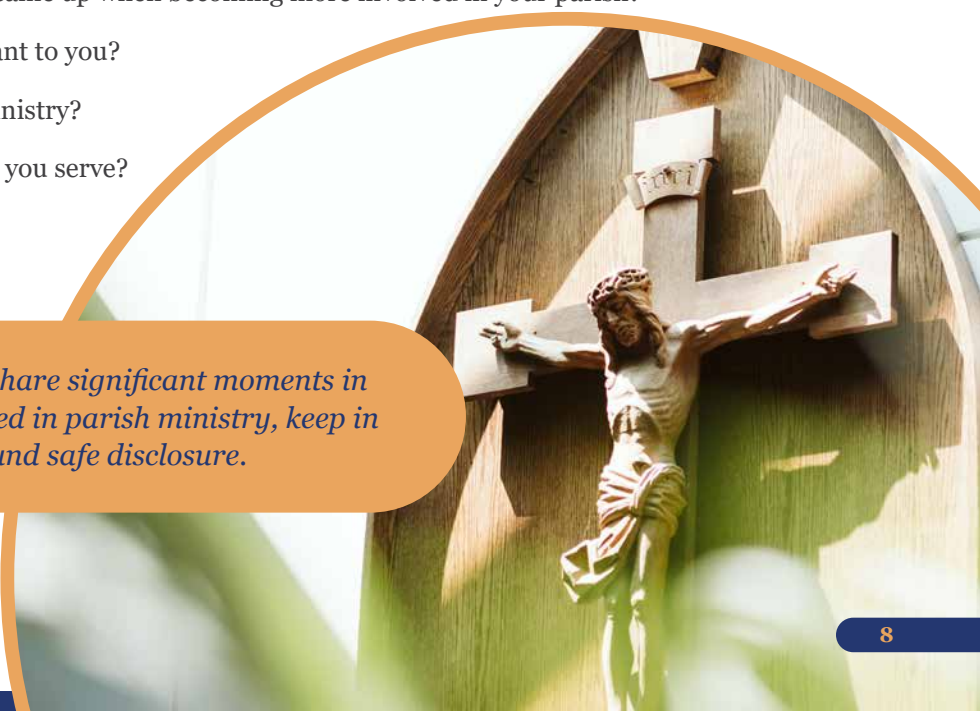
Matthew 20:1-16, Matthew 20:26-28, Matthew 25:14-46, Luke 12:41-48, Luke 19:11-27, 1 Corinthians 12:4-27, 1 Peter 4:8-11

(Note: if you would like to use an online bible, the Vatican website has one in multiple languages: <https://www.vatican.va/archive/bible/index.htm>)

- Through the lens of stewardship, pray on the scripture passage(s) that you choose. Where does the Holy Spirit stir you and lead you? In light of trying to be a good steward of your God-given time and talents, what is the deeper meaning of the passage?
- Journal your inspirations. Try to recall the emotions and life experiences around your ministry or major conversion moments that have impacted your life.
- Through parish ministry, where have you experienced personal growth, peace, and development?
- Were there any fears or anxieties that came up when becoming more involved in your parish?
- Why is your parish community important to you?
- Why did you begin serving in parish ministry?
- What is important about the ministries you serve?



Remember: *If you choose to share significant moments in your life or why you got involved in parish ministry, keep in mind personal boundaries around safe disclosure.*



Writing Your Lay Witness Talk (Continued)

4. Inviting people to join the stewardship way of life.

Your talk should help parishioners understand what your parish calls them to do and how to sign up. Compelling stories and quotes lack impact if you do not encourage parishioners to take action. As the old saying goes, “Strike while the iron is hot!” **Let parishioners know where the sign-up sheets are and how to return them, where to learn more about the various ministries, who to ask if they have questions, etc.** (We have various sign-up form templates for children, youth and adults on our website at www.archtoronto.org/stewardship, in the Parish Vitality tab, under Templates and Forms.) If your parish is hosting stewardship events such as a Parish Ministry Fair, invite them to attend.

Invite your fellow parishioners to commit to a life of stewardship using some of the following ideas:

- Invite them to reflect on their blessings and personal gifts and to consider if the giving back of their time and talent reflects the blessings received. (We can easily fall into a sense of repetition from day to day, forgetting to appreciate the present moment and all the gifts God has given us.)
- Stress that every parishioner has a gift to offer, a role to play in the parish community.
- Introduce the idea that we are called to serve God and neighbour by participating in the life of our parish.
- Encourage parishioners to try something new.
- Share with them the idea that their active stewardship will help to strengthen the parish and glorify God.
- Express that stewardship is a way of living a grateful and generous life.
- Through the good stewardship of all our gifts, we help each other get to Heaven!
- Stress the benefits of parish stewardship. Talk about the ways it serves God, neighbour and enriches oneself.
- When you talk about sharing talent, parishioners may feel that they have no special talents to share with their parish. Think of ways to overcome this misconception in your talk.
- As everyone has different talents, you can highlight some of the many different types of parish ministries people can join.
- When you talk about participating in the parish, make it clear that all are invited. People respond positively to a personal invitation.
- We are all stewards and all are accountable.
- Another idea could be to end your talk with a compelling stewardship verse from scripture or a meaningful quote from the saint your parish is named after. If your parish is not named after a quotable saint, perhaps you can find one from a saint you have a spiritual connection with or especially admire.

Remember: Ask your parish office for copies of any ministry sign up forms your parish may be using. Other resources they may have could include stewardship brochures, parish ministry fair information, a pastor’s stewardship letter (if he is doing one), etc. All of these can help you get more context around the resources and events at your parish for incorporation into your talk.



Final Considerations

Your Pastor has invited you to share your stewardship experience with the parish because he sees great potential in you. As such, you may want to ask him if there is anything in particular your talk should include. Here are some concluding points to consider:

- Pray to the Holy Spirit for help and guidance. A heartfelt talk is always the best when it comes from an authentic place.
- Start Early. Write the day and times you are speaking in your calendar so you can prepare well ahead of time. Do not write your talk the night before. Give yourself enough time to pray and reflect upon what you want to say. This will help make your talk much more impactful.
- If speaking at Mass, know exactly when you are speaking (e.g. before Mass, or during the announcements, etc.).
- Keep within the time limit. Check with your pastor on how long you should speak for and stick to it.
- Write your talk out. This is much better than speaking off the top of your head, otherwise known as “winging it”. Having a written copy will help ensure that you do not veer off track when the time comes.
- Be yourself! Speak naturally. Use words and phrases that are common to you. Speak slowly, pausing as necessary, and make eye contact. This will help you to come across as genuine and authentic.
- Practice. Do this in front of a mirror, then with family and people you trust.
- Record and watch yourself giving the talk. This will help you see if there are any “presentation ticks” in your speech. Common ones can include saying “uh”, “right”, “and so”, or rocking on your feet, using distracting repetitive hand motions, etc.
- Review your talk with your Pastor and a Stewardship Committee member (if your parish has such a committee). They can assist you with any parts of the talk you are unsure about.
- Remember boundaries. Privacy is important... do not share things about yourself you may regret later. Do not make yourself vulnerable. Overstepping personal boundaries can also make the talk awkward and distract from the message of stewardship. Also, do not reveal personal things about other people without their consent.
- Remain humble. You do not want to sound like you are self-aggrandizing or exaggerating things. Your talk should give glory to God and serve your neighbour.
- God loves a cheerful giver. The motivation should not be to give your time and talent out of a sense of forced obligation or guilt. Yours is a self-gift in loving service of God and neighbour that will enrich your entire parish community. It is important to remember that this whole experience should not be overly stressful. When rooted in prayer and self-reflection, it will enrich your spiritual life and your community tremendously. It will help everyone to gain a deeper appreciation for giving back to the Lord’s vineyard.

*Do not fret.
You will do great!*



Sample Lay Witness Talk

Opening Remarks

Good morning. My name is Simon and I am here to talk to you about stewardship in my life at St. Casimir's Parish. I have been a parishioner of St. Casimir's Parish my whole life, since 1992. This wonderful place is the birthplace of my faith in Christ. Father Joe asked me to provide a lay witness testimony at Mass this morning. How can you say "no" to Father Joe for anything? So here I am. Christian stewardship is giving your time and talent back to God in appreciation for all that God has given to you. During my talk, I hope to share with you my personal experience in trying to be a steward in our parish.

How stewardship personally affected you.

I am thankful to God for the opportunity to participate as an active member of this great parish of ours. I have worked with many of you, being a Lector and Acolyte at the Parish. When I was ending my high school years, I did not have a clue where I belonged or what I was going to do with my life. Many things were happening in my life at the time and so the question of what to do kept resurfacing. I found myself thinking more and more about how I could participate in this community that you, and those who came before us, had built over time. At the last call to stewardship, I took the step of faith and said, "Sure, I'll get involved. What do you want me to do?"

Boy did my life change!

I began associating names with those faces I would see at Mass each week. The parish was no longer a bunch of strangers, but a community of friends, a family. My involvement gave me with a sense of belonging. Accomplishments were being made and I was participating in them.

The world provides many promises of happiness and belonging, but they are shallow and feed only our basic instincts. We see what years of following the world has done to families of faith, and there is nothing good coming from it. God underpins all we have and our joy, by giving back, we understand how He works in our lives and how we work in His plans. Was there a little bit of fear at first to get the reading right when I first started my ministry as a lector, or to serve correctly and be in the right position? Sure, there was. But after a little while, the sense of participating in something greater than myself starting changing my outlook on how I can help to serve our parish.

Referencing and rooting your talk in scripture

I also discovered that it is true what Jesus told us in Matthew 6: 21— "For where your treasure is, there also will your heart be." This is in keeping with God's command to us to give back our first fruits. This means our time and talent because when we give either of these two, we give the most profound part of our lives, our lives themselves.

This was not always easy, but it was always very gratifying to know that I am giving back to God from the many blessings I have received. And I can tell you that God has provided for me and my heart is truly in our parish and that is a joyful thing. If we do not take care of our family homes, then no one else will do it for us. It is the same with our parish home, that brought us into union with God. He tasks us with its stewardship so that we and future generations may come closer to Him.

Inviting people to join the stewardship way of life.

I am not telling you all of this to bring attention to myself, but rather to encourage you to know the joy and happiness that I have found by giving back my time and talent to our parish. Today you will be given a letter from Fr. Joe, a brochure, and a Time and Talent Sign-up Form as you leave the Church. (Hold up a copy). We will also be hosting a Parish Ministry Fair in the parish hall after Mass today, if you would like to come downstairs to speak to members of the different ministries to learn more. (I also heard a rumor that there will be coffee and donuts there as well!)

We hope you will prayerfully consider sharing your time and talent by becoming more involved in the life of our parish. There are opportunities for all age groups from children to seniors. (Insert the various ministries that Fr. Joe wants to highlight here.) There is something for everyone.

If you would like to sign up, please return your completed Time and Talent Sign-up Form when you come to Mass next Sunday by handing it to an Usher as you enter the Church. Someone from the parish will contact you thereafter to discuss next steps.

These forms are very important because they help us plan for our parish's future needs and ministries. God does not create useless things, and so no time or talent given to the parish is "not needed". There is something every one of us can contribute to. I encourage you—from my personal experience—do not be afraid to get involved. Good things happen when you share of yourself; you will know the deep joy that comes from being a part of God's work here on earth.

In closing, I leave you with this thought by Padre Pio, "Pray, hope, and don't worry. Worry is useless. God is merciful and will hear your prayer." There are many wonderful things going on in our parish and we all have a part to play. My prayer and hope today is that you will consider sharing your time and talent with the parish community. We need you.

Thank you for listening. God bless.

If you have any questions about stewardship, please contact:

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We would like to give special thanks to Dr. Josephine Lombardi, Associate Professor, Systematic and Pastoral Theology and Assistant Dean for Academic Affairs for St. Augustine's Seminary for her contributions to this document.



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