

**FOLLOWING ARE FIVE SAMPLE LAY WITNESS TALKS.**

**NEW!!**

**Sample #1**

(After introduction) Stewardship means different things to different people. Let me share with you what stewardship has come to mean to me.

Reflecting back on the time spent growing up, I've realised more and more not only how loving my parents were but also how wise they were. I learned a lot from my parents, but there are four things I learned from their example that have had a particular impact on my life. First was that God loves us. He is good and we can trust Him. Second was that each of us is given certain gifts and talents and one of our responsibilities in life is to discover what those gifts and abilities are, develop them and use them to benefit others. Third was that to whom more is given, more is expected. Fourth was that having a job and spending time with your family is important but not enough. We also need to spend time being with and helping others.

With that kind of learning and my parents' example, I did not have a great deal of difficulty in grasping the concept of stewardship of prayer and service. I didn't call it that, but I did it. From the time I was in high school onward, I made sure I spent time doing things for and with other people, mostly through different types of volunteer work. As I continued to give of my time and service, I realised that I was growing spiritually. God and other people became a more important part of my life.

After graduating from college, I continued to give of my time and service through various church and community groups. Yet something was still missing. You see, I gave of my time and service but not my financial resources. I reasoned that I spent so much time in church and community activities that I didn't need to give regularly to the church or other community groups. Sure, I gave some, but it was sporadic and unplanned.

It wasn't until my wife and I completed a course for engaged couples seven years ago that I started to look even more seriously at my relationship with God. We realised that we couldn't hold back on any area of our giving because God wasn't holding back on any area of *His* giving. We also decided that we wanted God to be the center of our marriage. That led us to a decision to start giving of our finances in a planned and proportionate way. We started giving two percent of our income to the church and other charities in 1984. Five years later, we are giving at eight percent of our income to the church and other charities.

As we continued to give, we've learned that we are growing more spiritually and that our faith is deepening. By giving as we have, we have tried to place material things and money in their proper perspective. That has caused us to look at what we need versus what we want. For example, when we bought a new home almost two years ago, we bought a somewhat smaller house than we might have if we hadn't been practicing stewardship of our financial resources.

Stewardship has become a way of life for us. It's not always easy, but we try to live it. Presently, I am spending eight hours a week in ministry work outside of my job and my wife is spending three hours per week in her ministry work. In the area of sharing of our financial resources, 80 percent of our giving is church-related while the other 20 percent goes to community agencies. My wife and I are planning to move to the biblical tithe, 10 percent of our income, next month.

Stewardship of time, service and sharing has been and will continue to be an important part of our lives.

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**NEW!!**

### Sample #2

(After introduction) Stewardship: What is it? How do we do it? Will we like it? Does it hurt? Will it work for us? Why should we do it?

These are many of the questions that passed through my mind as we first heard the word when our parish held their stewardship renewal. I realized that the Church could never flourish and grow if everyone was supporting it like I was.

As I look back at my own decision on stewardship over last recent years, I notice that my ideals have changed. There were lots of reasons that I felt we should begin stewardship in our family. God has been very good to us. My husband and I have two healthy, happy children.

We have finally passed through the struggling years in our own business and now had time to think about other things. As I began to think about the Church and what it meant to me, I realised that if everyone was making the kind of limited time and financial commitment that I was then the church would not be here for my children. There was no other way it could continue without a higher level of support from me and other parishioners.

Besides, I had great expectations of the Church. It should be well equipped to teach my children all about the wonders of God. It should be able to care for the sick, feed the needy, care for the elderly.

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If my expectations were right, then I had to do my part to make them a reality. I was already giving some time to the church and with that time, my skills. But there had to be a strong commitment of time *and* a commitment of sharing my finances if the church was going to be able to do all the things I wanted it to.

Once I decided that perhaps stewardship was something our family needed to think about, I was rather hesitant to bring it up for family discussion. My husband is non-Catholic. Would he feel the same as I do? How would we handle contributions of time and finance to two churches? After we talked about how we felt and agreed that it was something we would try, my husband offered a simple solution. We would give one-fourth of our financial resources and time to his church and three-fourths to my church since our two children were members of our parish. We have never had a problem with this method.

Since we made our decision on stewardship, I think our outlook on lots of things has changed. We have become more supportive of various worthwhile needs and organizations in the community. I think it opened an avenue of thought that allows us to give without always questioning what we will get in return.

I came to embrace stewardship through the church but I have grown in stewardship to include the entire community. I feel that God expects us to minister to all people. My gift that fulfills my stewardship may be given to anyone who needs it. It is the giving and the support of God's children that is important. The spiritual rewards, the feeling of accomplishment that you are following God's way is the important things that you will reap from stewardship. You will know you are succeeding when the spirituality and feelings of stewardship far surpass the questions of how much you should give.

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### Sample #3

Good morning! My name is Ann Farmer and I have been a member of this parish for 13 years. I am also involved in (list parish activities). Father Bill has asked me to speak to you today about the 2008 Archbishop's Annual Appeal. While I was preparing this talk I learned a lot about the Annual Appeal and our parish. Two key questions came to mind as I was preparing:

**First, why do we need the Archbishop's Annual Appeal?** Can't we do the same things in our parish through our own ministries? The answer to this first question comes easily: No! We cannot! While we have hardworking, talented staff and volunteers in our parish who give their stewardship of time and talent unselfishly, we cannot provide or duplicate the efforts of the Archdiocesan services.

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By having the Archdiocese coordinate activities through various funded ministries and agencies, staffed with professionals, we eliminate much duplication, provide for the development of our volunteer ministers, and provide stable, long-term programs for the entire Archdiocese. Our own responsibility to God and to our parish is to be good stewards, committed to pledge our treasure to help pay for the good works of the ministries sponsored by the Archbishop's Annual Appeal, and to minister our time and talent to their agencies' activities wherever and whenever possible.

Our pledges to the Archbishop's Annual Appeal are distributed to more than 20 ministries and agencies. Directors of these offices prepare detailed budgets that are carefully reviewed, refined and monitored in the light of the needs of the people of our Archdiocese. Let me share with you just a few of the ways the appeal serves us all:

Thousands of young people and adults are part of religious education programs in our parishes. The parish directors and coordinators are assisted by the Office of Religious Education and Faith Formation who develop appropriate religious education materials and catechetical leadership training. This office also provides dynamic and exciting programs for the youth and young adult members of our communities.

This past year Catholic Charities provided crisis pregnancy support services through its offices. Its Office of Parish and Social Justice Ministry addresses the economic, spiritual, physical and emotional impact of poverty. The Pregnancy, Parenting & Adoption Program of Catholic Charities provides free, professional counseling to assist pregnant women with decision making, problem solving, and goal setting whether in deciding to keep her baby or offer her baby to an adopting couple. This program also assists families who wish to adopt a child.

Our parish goal this year for the Archbishop's Annual Appeal is (\$amount). It is based on a percentage of our total annual offertory collection. If we surpass our goal, we will receive back 100% of what is received over goal to use any way we wish for our own needs. If we don't reach our goal, however, Father will have to write a check from the parish resources to make up for the difference. That's because our parish is a member of the larger Church community, and has undeniable responsibility to support the ministries of that larger Church.

The people of this parish have a history of generosity. If you have been a regular supporter of the Archbishop's Annual Appeal in the past, please continue that generous tradition and even consider increasing your gift this year. If you have not ever given to the Annual Appeal, I implore you to consider joining with me in keeping the Catholic community of North Georgia alive, vibrant, Christ-centered, and responsive to the needs of God's people. Thank you.

### Sample #4

Good morning! My name is Ann Stafford and I have been a parishioner here for 13 years. I've been asked to speak to you this weekend about the 2008 Archbishop's Annual Appeal. Next weekend is Treasure Commitment Sunday and you are asked to bring in the pledge envelope that Archbishop Gregory mailed to your homes if you have not already mailed it back directly to the Archdiocese. If you cannot find that envelope, we'll have more here at Mass for you next Sunday. Before we make our pledge to the appeal I wanted to take a moment to share with you some personal thoughts about what the Archbishop's Annual Appeal is really all about.

Upon reflection, most of us can truthfully say that we have been blessed by God with many wonderful gifts. Our families, our homes, our work, good friends, and the many freedoms we enjoy are all evidence of God's gifts. While most of us are certainly not wealthy, we have been very blessed. The problem is that some among us, maybe even here in our own parish, struggle a bit more than others to see these blessings.

Each day in our Archdiocese, people in need turn to the Church for help and support. Some are hungry, some are homeless, some are sick and some are even imprisoned by pain, anger or fear. Jesus said "The poor will always be with you" and He certainly was right. In addition to the poor, however, there are other people who turn to the Church for help in other ways. These people ask for our help in bringing Christ to others just as powerfully: enabling them to work with our youth, our young adults, our catechists. People ask for help in preparing for marriage or re-marriage. People ask your help to become priests or deacons. They ask you to help them minister to the disabled; to train parish leaders to reach out to the Hispanic members of our Catholic community. People ask you to help them form new Catholic missions in areas where there is no Catholic Mass.

The Archbishop's Annual Appeal is about being good stewards of God's many gifts to us. We are all one family who in our hearts, and moved by the Holy Spirit, can make a tremendous difference through our good deeds and by sharing our blessings with other members of our Archdiocesan family.

As you fill out your pledge card next weekend, please take a moment to thank God for all He has done for you and be as generous as you can. God will never be outdone in generosity. A pledge of \$10 or \$15 a month, which is much less than the cost of two movie tickets, will make a tremendous difference. Whatever you do, you will be doing it for those who really need you. Thank you and God bless you.

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### Sample #5

Good morning! I can't believe that I'm actually standing before you this morning, but when Father Bill asked me to speak to you today I just couldn't say "no" to him! My name is Ann Stafford and I have been a member of this parish community for seven years. I don't have any children but I have plenty of nieces and nephews that I love to spend time with and just spoil rotten.

I grew up in a family that did not understand stewardship. Sure, we went to Mass and we learned right from wrong. But when the offertory basket came around, my dad did what many Catholics do: he threw in a few dollars, if he had some in his pocket.

In the last few years, I have grown in my understanding of what it means to be a good steward. I understand that stewardship is not a season of the year and it's not reaching into my purse for a few extra dollars as the offertory basket starts its way down the aisle. In the last few years I've come to realize that my stewardship of treasure needs to be prayerfully planned on a yearly basis. It needs to be a grateful response to all the wonderful gifts that the Lord has given to me. And although I am not wealthy by anybody's standard, I have been gifted with a home, my health, a job, and friends that are a blessing to me. I may not have enough money for a fancy new house or a brand new car but, yes, I have a great deal to be thankful for!

My commitment to stewardship began rather oddly in a conversation with a friend over how much to tip a waitress who had been particularly attentive to us. We decided that the usual 15 percent may not be enough to really show her our appreciation for her good service. Then my friend, Susan, made a comment that really stunned me. She said "Do you ever think about the fact that we are so willing to leave a tip of more than 15% to someone who keeps our iced tea glass full but it's so hard for us to give more than a pittance to the Lord who has blessed us with life, health, and blessing upon blessing?"

I don't think Sue ever really knew how astounding that little comment was! To be honest, it haunted me for a long while! I kept hearing it over and over and over. It gnawed at me! One day I sat down with my calculator and figured out how much I was giving back to the Lord. It's humiliating to tell you today that it was less than 1% of my income. I was giving less than 1% of my income in thanksgiving for every blessing that the Lord kept heaping on me!

I can't tell you that I immediately jumped to the biblical tithe of 10% because that would be a bold-faced lie. However, each year since then I have added more and more to the offering that I give back to the Lord. Each year I make it a very prayerful decision, a *planned* decision.

I do not believe that stewardship is about what the parish needs or what the Archdiocese needs. If it were, we would all be in trouble! There is far more need in the world than we could ever hope to overcome. So if our giving were based on need, we would never be able to stop! But it is not; at least, it is not only about the needs of others. It's about our *own* need — our need to *give*. When you think about it, it is clear that God has blessed us abundantly; far more than we deserve. We in North Georgia are far more fortunate than the vast majority of humanity — all of whom are God's children, no less beloved than we are. In recognition of this abundant and undeserved blessing, we must share with others who are less fortunate.

I believe my personal first step was to actually plan a specific amount to contribute consistently each week. It wasn't a huge increase but it seemed like a big step at the time, and somehow I was able to make ends meet. I must have cut back on something, but I could not tell you exactly what. And by the time it came time to take another step, I hardly noticed it anymore. And so it has been for every step since.

I will not pretend to have come to appreciate the value of stewardship overnight. At first, it was a sense of shame that made me open my wallet. But eventually, I came to realize what stewardship was about. And here is what I have learned: it is all about sharing. It is about freely sharing with others the blessings that God has freely shared with me. It is not just about tithing, *per se*; it is about *generosity*. If you are grateful for God's many blessings in your life, then sharing is the only legitimate response.

If you think you cannot do it, let me assure you that you can. Take a step, however small. And next year, take another. There will never be a better time to start. There are always good reasons not to give, whether it be student loans, retirement, or everything in between. It is never going to get any easier — unless you accept God's call to generosity in your heart. All you have to do is put your trust in the Lord and take a step. Most of us will not become saints overnight. But perhaps we can reach that goal one step at a time. Thank you and God bless you.

*Thanks be to God!*