

## RESPONSE TO DR. MEYER'S QUESTION

The Discipleship Subcommittee was composed of pastors and lay leaders in stewardship from multiple parishes in the Archdiocese, school principals, members of the Archdiocesan Office of Development and Stewardship, Archdiocesan Office of Finance, and Archdiocesan Office of Religious Education.

The Subcommittee reviewed comments from interviews conducted with pastors, school principals, archdiocesan leadership and parishioners and the results of third-party market research conducted during Phase 1 of the Planning Study. It also reviewed the USCCB Report "Stewardship: A Disciple's Response", and other expert publications on stewardship. The Subcommittee's work was also enriched by the experience of other dioceses in the country, such as the Diocese of Wichita and Chicago. Several members of the Subcommittee have been involved for many years in the International Catholic Stewardship Council (ICSC) and have participated in their conferences.

Stewardship is a Biblical but often misunderstood concept. The meaning of "stewardship" frequently varies from one pastor or one parishioner to another even though the original United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) pastoral letter on stewardship (*Stewardship: A Disciple's Response* <http://www.usccb.org/stewardship/disciplesresponse.pdf>) was published more than 15 years ago.

To many, stewardship simply means "money" or "fund raising"; however, this narrow view misses many of the important elements of true stewardship:

- ✓ Stewardship is based on a true understanding of **Christian discipleship** that is rooted in on-going faith formation and conversion.
- ✓ Stewardship is a life-long and year-round process, not an annual event. **Stewardship and discipleship** should be related to all aspects of Catholic life.
- ✓ Stewardship is about sacrifice – not just giving from one's surplus of time, talent or treasure.
- ✓ "We are God's trustees" for all of the gifts that He bestows on His people every day. As trustees, we have the responsibility to nurture, grow and share (not hoard) these gifts.

The Subcommittee also noted that discussions of stewardship were intricately tied to discussions of discipleship; hence the decision to focus ultimately on **the broader concept of discipleship which is the precursor to stewardship**.

Subcommittee discussions made it clear that stewardship could not be adequately addressed without also addressing the concept of discipleship. The Subcommittee changed its name in November 2007 from the Stewardship to the Discipleship Subcommittee and the Planning Committee endorsed this change at its own meeting in November 2007.

The Discipleship Subcommittee agreed to address the following interrelated elements of discipleship:

- ✓ Faith formation for adults and discipleship foundations for youth (children and teens)
- ✓ Fellowship
- ✓ Participation in parish ministries
- ✓ Stewardship

The Office of Stewardship prepared and distributed the “2009 Parish Stewardship Resource Manual” which is faithful to the theology of stewardship, and parishes are encouraged to use it. It certainly elaborates on the traditional concept of “time, talent and treasure”. This concept does not contradict in any way the broader concept of discipleship. It is a fundamental part of it.

After a year’s study the Subcommittee included in its report that the mantra of “time, talent and treasure” is not resonating with some people today as a reflection on the common observation among interviewees, pastors, lay leaders, and even experts on stewardship, that the phrase has been overused and unfortunately many parishioners have come to believe that stewardship is only concerned with the last of the three terms.

Without a significant **change of focus** and without a **new vocabulary** to use, there is no reason to think that we will become more successful in “growing” our Church. Stewardship has tended to address the needs of the parish or the diocese, while discipleship emphasizes the believer’s spiritual need to give.

Discipleship can best flourish when leaders and laity alike understand that it is a **process** that begins with **conversion**-- to worship and honor God above all for everything we have in this life. Without the conversion in each human heart the giving will not be from the **first fruits** but from what **remains**.

We are all affected profoundly by language, whether we recognize it or not. It is a fact that many people have grown bored with the terms Time, Talent and Treasure and by their constant repetition. As these are foundational terms in the Bishop’s Letter A *Disciple’s Response*, they must be used in the discipleship/stewardship process, but those responsible for communicating the message could **vary the language** if they are having difficulty retaining people’s attention.

TERMS	ALTERNATIVES
Time	Disposable time, free time, time for God and community
Talent	Aptitude, skill, ability

Treasure	Money, disposable income, assets, wealth, financial resources
Tithe	Proportionate giving
Stewardship program	Discipleship process, discipleship as a way of life
Time, Talent and Treasure	God-given gifts,* giving from the heart, the hand and the pocketbook, returning a grateful portion to God
We need.....	You are invited.....
Meeting our expenses	Fulfilling our mission

*\*The word **gift** is frequently used to denote what God gives us but, like the terms Time, Talent and Treasure, may be overused. It is especially tricky because the word gift usually denotes a transfer of ownership. In the gifts God gives us he only entrusts them to us. Nothing is totally ours. This goes clear against the grain of thinking in a capitalist society, and is a values problem that we must constantly address.*

The Planning Committee is still working on a discipleship collaborative initiative, and it will expand further on the broader concept of discipleship and its integral relation with stewardship, as one of its fundamental elements, together with faith formation, fellowship, social justice, etc. Since the proposal is still in progress, parishes are encouraged to continue using the actual resources available through the Stewardship Office.

Thank you for your thoughtful question. God bless you and your Stewardship ministry.

Sincerely,

Monica Oppermann

Chairperson, Archdiocese Discipleship Planning Sub-Committee