

Creating a Lay Witness Talk

Step-by-Step Guide to creating a Stewardship Lay Witness Talk:

You may be asked to give your Lay Witness Talk at one or all Masses on Pre-Appeal Sunday (preferred), Appeal Sunday, Follow Up Sunday or all of the above.

Follow these six steps to ensure the success of your Witness:

1) Pray. Pray while preparing. Pray while waiting. Pray while walking up to the lectern. Pray when finished. Many times it is helpful to work with a mentor (couple) and have that person (couple) share with you a “prayer minute” before you begin your talk with confidence in God’s blessings.

Stewardship Prayer

My parish is composed of people like me.

I help make it what it is.

It will be friendly, if I am.

It will be holy, if I am.

Its pews will be filled, if I help fill them.

It will do great work, if I work.

It will be prayerful, if I pray.

It will make generous gifts to many causes, if I am a generous giver.

It will bring others into worship, if I invite and bring them.

It will be a parish of loyalty and love, of fearlessness and faith, of compassion, charity and mercy, if I, who make it what it is, am filled with these same things.

Therefore, with the help of God, I now dedicate myself to the task of being all things that I want my parish to be.

Amen.

2) Introduce Yourself. Your lay witness will include much about who you are through the stories you share. However, at the beginning, you should briefly share your name, family members and parish affiliation.

A personal example is:

“Good morning! I am N. and I have been married to my spouse, N., for N. years. We are blessed to be expecting our sixth child. I would give you their names and ages but then I might have to quiz you later. We have been members of the parish for more than seven years. I would like to express our gratitude to Father N. for asking us to share our stewardship story with you.”

This short “ice-breaking” introduction allows you to “see” those to whom you are speaking and helps take away some of the nervousness.

3) Define Stewardship. Stewardship is our grateful response to an ever-loving God who has given us all that we have. Begin to define stewardship in your own words as it pertains to your life and to your personal story. This portion of your talk should include appropriate quotes from the U.S. Bishops’ Pastoral letter, “Stewardship: A Disciple’s Response,” which is available online, in your parish office, or at the diocese. The definition you share needs to be what you believe as well as how you try to live the stewardship message in your day-to-day activities. A personal example is found on the next page.

“Stewardship has more to do with the vitality of the parish community than with the hours we volunteer or the dollars we place in the collection basket. Stewardship is about how we live our faith, not just about how we spend our time or money.”

4) Include Scripture

Read the Scriptures for the day you are speaking and refer to them if possible. While it is not your role to give a homily, it should be a joy to share a quote from the Scripture readings which connects with your stewardship message.

The Scriptures are filled with stewardship messages. The challenge is to find an appropriate quote and share it within the context of your talk. Remember, if you don't see one in the readings of the day, use your favorite stewardship Scripture verse. It makes a difference to many people to hear the connection between the Bible and stewardship.

On the following page there is an example of a stewardship reflection based on the readings for Pre-Appeal Sunday (April 14/15, Third Sunday of Easter, Cycle B) that might be appropriate to a lay witness talk: *“As today’s Gospel reveals, the first meal shared with the risen Lord happened in a place called Emmaus. Perhaps there is no better time to reflect on this story than in those prayerful moments at Mass when we return to our place after receiving Holy Communion. Those few moments give us an opportunity to reflect on our stewardship of Christ’s presence within us. We have a chance to practice hospitality by inviting Jesus into our hearts to walk and talk with us about our own Emmaus journey. We can relive once again the time when he broke bread for the disciples. And just as they did, we too can recognize Christ in this meal we have just shared with others. **The disciples in today’s Gospel came to know Jesus in the breaking of the bread. When we share what we have with those who are in need, we, too, will discover Jesus in our midst.**”*

A scriptural stewardship reference to use at any time is:

“Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and decay destroy and thieves break in and steal. But store up treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor decay destroys, nor thieves break in and steal.

For where your treasure is, there also will your heart be” (Matthew 6:19)

-Where is your treasure? Where is your heart?

5) Share Your Story

What is the stewardship message that we are being called to share? The message for a lay witness begins with the recognition of our lives being a constant stewardship story.

During the February 10th DCA Kickoff Training Workshop Bishop Robert Coerver led the group through the following reflections. You are encouraged to reflect on these four themes. Write down your reflection and use them as the catalyst to your lay witness talk.

1) I am loved. Reflect on how you are loved. Reflect on who loves you. Reflect on how they love you. Reflect on why they love you. Especially reflect on God’s loving presence in your life.

2) I am called to love. Reflect on who calls you to love and why you are called to love. Reflect on the times you accepted the call to love (and the times you didn’t). How did that feel? How did you see God’s love through your acceptance of His calling?

3) Who needs my love? Think of those who need your love. Especially think of specific diocesan needs you are aware of such as our youth, our priests, and our underserved parish communities.

4) How can I witness God’s love? You’ve shared in question two how you accepted the call to love in the past. Share with your fellow parishioners how you can witness to God’s love. How can you witness God’s love through the Diocesan Catholic Appeal? To witness is to give testimony. To be an example of God’s love.

Whether we come from a large, medium, or small parish or family, or we are clergy, religious, or lay persons, the same basic concepts apply. The message can be simple or complex, and so can the messenger. It boils down to people of faith at all levels sharing their gifts and their giftedness in the way they live their lives and speak about their faith relationship with Christ.

As a lay witness, you provide three important benefits to the parish.

- First, other parishioners physically see and hear from someone “just like me.”
- Second, they hear about how spiritual conversion leads to living stewardship.
- Third, the pastor is not perceived as being the only message bearer.

Personal stories make a stewardship witness come alive for others. Sometimes, witnesses share about major decisions, such as:

“I kept feeling that my high pressure job was pulling me away from my marriage, my family and my faith. It took a lot of prayer and support from my wife, but I quit that job and found another one that paid less, but brought more balance into my life. I now spend more time at home and attend Mass, but also serve in the RCIA program. We also give more generously of our income with the church. I no longer strive for material things. Living as a Christian Steward taught me that God’s love and grace are enough for me.”

6) Invite

Encourage and challenge fellow parishioners to participate in the parish as partners, growing in faith, and responding in gratitude. As a lay witness, we have little or no control over who attends Mass that week other than personally inviting people we know. What we can do as we prepare our witness talk is pray for those who need to hear the Stewardship message. As an invitation, try: *“As a family, we have faced financial challenges, health challenges, and many other challenges that most of you can relate to your own experiences. As this parish community grows in its stewardship efforts, I encourage you to share your stewardship stories with one another.”*

A sample invitation and conclusion specific to the 2018-19 DCA might include words like this:

“Speaking of gifts, a great gift to Father N. would be for each of us to participate in the DCA by completing our commitment form next week on Appeal Sunday. This would be a wonderful way to show your support and appreciation for him and to help our parish meet its goal in support of the Diocese of Lubbock. In conclusion, remember, we are all loved and we are all asked to share God’s love through prayer, service and charity.

Some Closing Thoughts

As you present your witness, remember that the most effective witness follows from being prayerful, sincere, enthusiastic, friendly and, probably, nervous. Simply put your best foot forward and give the witness with which God has blessed you. Using the format and ideas presented, prepare your personal lay witness. Even if you are not asked to present your witness in a public setting, you will be able to use appropriate portions of your witness any time you have the chance. Share your witness with a friend at lunch, a business associate at dinner, your foursome on the golf course, a backyard neighbor, the parents of your children’s friends, or any place that God affords you an opportunity.

As your life continues as a good steward, occasionally dust off your written witness, read it, and revise it based on the realities of life and your deepening faith. The final evaluation rests with God as you hear the words of the Gospel, *“Well done, my good and faithful servant... Come, share your master’s joy” (Matt 25:21)*