

Welcome to the stewardship pages of our diocesan website. We hope you will find resources here that will help you develop a year-round program of stewardship development and education.

As the Bishop's Assistant for Stewardship, allow me first to offer my own theology of stewardship. This will tell you the way I understand stewardship.

I understand stewardship as the way we live out our lives as children of God and as baptized members of God's household here on earth. It is a way of life, a way of being in the world. It is an attitude in which we acknowledge that all that we have and all that we are is a gift from the loving God, who generously entrusts us with good gifts. As we acknowledge who we are, stewards of God's creation, and whose we are, disciples of Jesus Christ, we begin to live lives of stewardship. We become more generous, growing into the image of God. As we become more generous, we experience the grace of God in new ways. As we become people who give joyfully and thankfully to God through God's church, we empower the Church for mission and ministry. As we become stewards, we experience the sense of offering, of returning to God a portion of what God has so generously entrusted to us. As we make joyful offerings to God, we are drawn closer to God, and our spiritual lives are enriched.

It is for these reasons that it is important to develop a year-round process of stewardship education and formation. For these reasons we offer education throughout the year, not only as we approach the time of the stewardship commitment program, known by some as the annual pledge drive or campaign.

There are some who think stewardship is exclusively about the church's need to receive. This is not true. Stewardship is about our need to give. If we are to become the people God created us to be, we will learn to be generous; we will become people who make joyful offerings to God.

There are some who think stewardship is only about money. It is about money and far more than money. It is about all of life. It is about creation. It is about relationships with our families and with others. It is about the way we use our time. It is about the way we care for our bodies. It is about all of life.

Stewardship is about money. Money is an important symbol of what we value in our lives. If we say we are generous but are not generous with our money, we fool ourselves. Stewardship is about being generous with every aspect of our lives -- our time, our talent, and our money. There are some who say our relationship with money is the chief spiritual issue of our lives.

What follows are resources that I pray will be helpful to you in developing a stewardship formation program that will be life-giving and transforming. It includes many of the steps your parish can take to broaden and deepen its understanding and practice of healthy stewardship.

*Bruce A. Rockwell
Financial Officer and
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Some thoughts about Stewardship and its meaning in our lives

STEWARDSHIP is not a program. *STEWARDSHIP* is a process, ... a process of *CONVERSION*.

When God breaks in on a *sufficiently prepared people*, a new belief and practice of *STEWARDSHIP* is developed, and a joyful generosity emerges.

Good *STEWARDSHIP* centers upon the conversion of people, not the collection of more dollars.

Good *STEWARDSHIP* enables church leaders to talk about money in ways that transform lives.

God loves us just where we are in our spiritual journey ... but doesn't want us to stay there.

There are more people who act their way into a new way of thinking than there are people who think their way into a new way of acting.

Do we look at life from the viewpoint of scarcity or abundance? If you want to be rich, give. If you want to be poor, grasp.

We know:

- Money represents power, security, and identity in our culture
- Our relationship with money is a powerful force in our lives
- Money can control our lives

We also know:

- Many people come to hear about stewardship feeling defensive
- Congregations often are looking for a "quick fix" for what they believe are their financial problems
- Many so-called stewardship programs do not work because they focus on moral imperatives - "shoulds" and "oughts"

We believe:

- God gives us choices about how we use our money
- The use of money has spiritual as well as material implications
- It is important to create a safe place for people to experience acceptance, forgiveness and understanding over the sometimes tough issues of money

If we are to assist people in their spiritual journeys and help them to make the "conversion connection,"

We will offer:

- Opportunities for grace-filled experiences that will allow people to choose to reorient the way they use money
- Opportunities that will break the *conspiracy of silence* about issues of money and faith
- A process that will provide people with an opportunity to think about the role of money in their lives in an entirely new way
- An effective stewardship formation program that will bring about transformation in people's spiritual lives

What are some of the Words of Conversion, the words that describe our stewardship journey, the words that may invite others to join us in the journey?

- Thanksgiving
- Grace, Gratitude, Generosity
- Abundance
- Offering
- Gifts, Giftedness
- Life-changing
- Spiritual health

CONDITIONS FOR EFFECTIVE STEWARDSHIP EDUCATION AND DEVELOPMENT IN THE PARISH

Bill Yon, a fellow sojourner in the stewardship vineyard developed a list of conditions that we have found that contribute to effective stewardship development in the parish. With thanks to Bill for his work, here is that list.

- The clergy are tithers or are committed to a plan of increased proportionate giving leading to the tithe.
- The clergy are willing to witness publicly to their own understanding and practice of stewardship, and invite members of the parish to reexamine their own beliefs and practices as well.
- Vestry members are also committed to proportionate giving [leading toward the tithe] as the pattern of their own practice of stewardship and give clear encouragement to others to do the same.
- Stewardship education focuses on the need of the giver to give, not the need of the church to receive.
- The rector and vestry are committed to increasing the percentage of parish income devoted to mission outside the parish, and hold specific mission opportunities in front of the congregation.
- Opportunities are provided annually for parishioners to talk through their decisions about giving with their fellow Christians.

- Before the stewardship commitment program, members are given the training necessary to approach this ministry with clarity and confidence.
- A careful plan is developed to carry a stewardship education effort through to a successful conclusion.
- Careful evaluation of the year-round parish stewardship program is conducted annually that enables the parish to build on successes and learn from mistakes from year to year.

PUTTING A LONG-TERM, YEAR-ROUND STEWARDSHIP PROGRAM IN PLACE

What follows are the many of the components of what we believe constitute an effective, long-term, year-round program of stewardship formation.

- Parish Mission Statement
- Vestry Stewardship Statement
- Stewardship Ministry Team that Functions Year-Round
- Educational Programs about *God's Abundance*, about our *giftedness*, about the sense of offering as a way we draw closer to *God*
- Invitations to Engage in Discussions Regarding Attitudes about Money
- Year-Round Sermons and Lay Witness Opportunities that witness to lives of thankful stewards and talk about ways in which *God's Grace* is experienced through generous acts of giving
- Quarterly Pledge Statements with Signed Letters of Thanks, also containing Descriptions of Ministries Supported by These Offerings
- Parish Stewardship Report Describing the Ministry and Mission of the Church that is Supported by the Offerings of Time, Talent and Money of its Members often called *A Vision for Ministry*
- A Well-Thought and Well-Planned Commitment Program That is Conducted by Trained Volunteers Who Have Attended A Significant Training Program That Includes Theology and Witness As Well As Practical Ideas
- Letters that Thank People for their Financial Commitments and Confirm the Amount of their Commitment, Signed by the Rector, Wardens, Stewardship Chair, and Treasurer

- A Legacy Stewardship Program that will inform people about the stewardship of accumulated assets and invite them to consider making gifts to support the mission and ministry of the church

Stewardship Commitment Programs That Contribute to Conversion and Transformation

PREPARED ESPECIALLY FOR
STEWARDSHIP LEADERS
IN
THE DIOCESE OF WESTERN MASSACHUSETTS
AND
THROUGHOUT THE CHURCH

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Stewardship Commitment Programs

Introduction:

What is the mission of the Church?

The mission of the church is to restore all people to unity with God and each other in Christ.

How does the Church pursue its mission?

The Church pursues its mission as it prays and worships, proclaims the Gospel, and promotes justice, peace and love.

What is the duty of all Christians?

The duty of all Christians is to follow Christ; to come together week by week for corporate worship; and to work, pray and give for the spread of the kingdom of God.

From the Catechism or "Outline of Faith," Book of Common Prayer, pages 845 – 862. The references quoted are found on pages 855 and 856.

The church is in the *CONVERSION BUSINESS*. The church's mission is to help each one of us as we strive to allow God to draw us into a closer relationship with Our Creator. It is through stewardship education and development that the church can actually be in the conversion business. Stewardship is a means by which parishioners can strengthen and deepen their faith!

Stewardship development consists of both education and commitment. Education is essential. But a commitment program is also essential since it is through the commitment we make that we live out our beliefs about stewardship.

What follows are descriptions of four financial stewardship commitment programs. Each one of these programs will give you an opportunity to bring together a significant number of people from the parish for education about stewardship. Stewardship training, the opportunity to study scripture, pray, hear a witness, and think about a personal response, has proven to be the most effective way to develop more loving, more thankful, more generous disciples of Jesus Christ.

The Faithful Member Home Visitation Commitment Program

The basic requirements for a successful Faithful Member Visitation Commitment Program include:

1. A discernment process through which the parish stewardship ministry team will invite persons to prayerfully consider being part of the ministry of stewardship visitation.
2. A thorough training event, no visitors making visits without participating in the training. The training event should include personal witness, prayer, and bible study as well as tips on visiting.
3. Trained and motivated visitors; sufficient number of visitors so that no visitor is expected to make more than three visits!
4. Careful screening of the homes to receive visits. Do not visit where there will be no welcome.
5. Leaders to personally report back to after the visits are completed.
6. Mail contact with all households before and after the visits.
7. A celebration to honor the visitors.
8. A signed thank you letter to all pledging households thanking them for their pledge and confirming the amount.

Strengths of Home Visits

- Involves a large number, as many as 25%, of the households in a significant training workshop about stewardship as conversion
- Provides for face-to-face contact
- Allows for personal witness

Limitations of Home Visits

- Requires overcoming the hesitancy about making home visits
- May require follow up if some visitors do not make their assigned visits in a timely manner

The Festive Meal Commitment Program

The elements for a successful Festive Meal Commitment Program include:

1. A wonderful place for the meal!
2. Joyful, uplifting entertainment!
3. A training session for all table hosts/hostesses and discussion leaders that includes prayer, Bible study, and personal witness as well as instruction about their duties at the dinner.
4. Mail to all households well before the dinner.
5. Trained table hosts/hostesses who personally invite persons to sit at their table.
6. Trained discussion leaders.
7. A brief Bible study.
8. A brief lay witness, a personal witness and/or statement of vision by the rector and an inspiring keynote speaker.
9. A signed thank you letter to all pledging households thanking them for their pledge and confirming the amount.

Strengths of a Festive Meal

- Provides for face-to-face contact with members of the congregation
- Educational materials about stewardship and the mission of the church can be distributed easily
- Everyone hears the same presentation and message
- Strengthens the sense of being the Body of Christ

Limitations of a Festive Meal

- Does not reach shut-ins
- A large crowd can limit conversation and discussion
- Does not reach those members of the congregation who chose not to come

The Personal Note Commitment Program

The elements for a successful Personal Note Commitment Program include:

1. Six pieces of mail into each home with the final piece being a personal [perhaps hand-written] note.
2. The five pieces of mail that precede the personal note might include:
 - A letter from the Stewardship Chair with a personal witness
 - A letter from the rector offering both a theology of stewardship and a personal witness
 - A letter from the Senior Warden with a personal witness and highlighting one of the ministries of the parish that our offerings support
 - A letter from the Junior Warden with a personal witness and highlighting another one of the ministries of the parish.
 - A letter from the Treasurer, again highlighting a ministry of the parish, being careful not to sound like stewardship is about the church's need to receive. Remember that stewardship is about our need to give.
 - A letter from a revered lay person offering a personal witness about stewardship.
3. A training session for those who will write personal notes that includes bible study, prayer and witness.
4. Use a very good mail merge program so that all the letters are personally addressed
5. Use first class stamps.
6. Letters that have a personal touch are more apt to be read. Your goal is to have parishioners respond. It is imperative that your messages have a creative, personal touch.
7. Remember to send a signed thank you letter after receipt of the pledge that also confirms the amount of the pledge.

Strengths of Personal Notes

- Includes all members of the congregation
- Is non-confrontational
- Is great for “shy Episcopalians” for whom speaking about their faith is difficult

Limitations of Personal Notes

- Resembles secular appeal for funds
- May be ineffective if discontent exists in the congregation because of the one-way communication.

The Cottage Meeting Commitment Program

The elements for a successful Cottage Meeting Commitment Program include:

1. A host home for every 8 to 10 persons/households in the congregation.
2. A training session for all host/hostesses, discussion leaders and those who will do the lay witness at the meetings that will not only give them instruction about their duties at the cottage meetings but also serve as a model for the Cottage Meeting itself.
3. Mail contact with all households before and after the visits.
4. A trained host/hostess for each home who will personally invite people to their home and follow up with those they have invited.
5. A trained discussion leader for each home.
6. A brief Bible study.
7. A lay witness about stewardship at each home.
8. Dessert.
9. A signed thank you letter to all pledging households thanking them for their pledge and confirming the amount.

Strengths of Cottage Meetings

- Provides for face-to-face contact with members of the congregation
- Educational materials about stewardship and the mission of the church can be distributed easily
- The presentation and message about stewardship as a conversion issue is delivered by well trained members of the congregation
- Strengthens the sense of being the Body of Christ

Limitations of Cottage Meetings

- Does not reach shut-ins
- Does not reach those members of the congregation who chose not to come
- May be ineffective if there is conflict within the congregation

Stewardship Components that Strengthen Your Commitment Program

- A Mission Statement that identifies clearly the mission of your congregation. For example the Mission Statement of St. Mark's Church in East Longmeadow is "Making disciples who make disciples."
- Parish Action Plans that identify the priority areas of ministry and mission that the parish leaders have identified as important this year. They may speak of new ministry programs the parish leaders feel God is calling the congregation to do and support, as the offerings of the members of the church become more faithful and generous.
- A Vestry Stewardship Statement that identifies the stewardship beliefs and practices of the clergy and elected leaders and invites each member of the congregation to prayerfully consider their own response.
- A Vision for Ministry, A Parish Narrative, A Narrative Budget, or A Stewardship Report that identifies the ministries that the offerings of time, talent and money are currently supporting. Your parish budget can be allocated to show how the financial offerings are supporting ministries of:
 - Service to others beyond the parish
 - Worship
 - Christian nurture
 - Pastoral Care

Much of the information in this packet of materials about stewardship commitment programs has been taken from *A Manual for Stewardship Development Programs in the Congregation*, written by The Episcopal Network for Stewardship [TENS] and published by Morehouse Publishing and is used with permission. Other information contained above is taken from *A Treasure Chest of Stewardship Resources*, available through TENS, and is used with permission.