

**Stewardship Financial 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 "The mission of the community of St. Mark's Church is to spread the good news of Jesus Christ through joyous worship, ongoing Christian formation, and active spiritual outreach offered through the collective giving of our time, talent and treasure."
- 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.