

The Formation of Christian Stewards



A Parish Stewardship Council Handbook

Prepared by the Office of Stewardship, Catholic Diocese of Wichita

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The Formation of Christian Stewards

PREFACE

To many, the term stewardship is misunderstood. All too often, due to the manner and context in which we use and communicate the term stewardship, there has resulted a fear and negative connotation as to what it implies. The frequent use of the term outside of and absent its fundamental and foundational understanding of and connection to the Christian call to discipleship tends to suggest and form, in the minds of many, that it is simply a process to enhance development and / or fundraising efforts.

The U. S. Bishops' pastoral letter, "*Stewardship – A Disciple's Response*," first published in 1992, states, "Stewardship is an expression of discipleship, with the power to change how we understand and live out our lives. Good stewards live with joy and gratitude for the blessings they have received—including those that have multiplied through diligence and hard work. Indeed, good stewards live in communion with Christ and through Christ and the Spirit strive to return all gifts to the Father 'with an increase'."

Under the direction of the parish pastor, it is the role of a parish stewardship council to witness, invite, encourage and provide the opportunity and facilitate the spiritual and practical "*Formation of Christian Stewards*" within each of their respective parish communities.

In order to effectively fulfill the role and duties entailed in serving as a parish stewardship council, those selected to serve must, as a pre-requisite, be formed in the spirituality of stewardship, witnessing to such in their own Christian way of life and actively involved in the process of forming Christian stewards within their parish community.

This document seeks to provide the necessary formation, best practices and resources to assist parish stewardship councils in their ongoing role of forming Christian stewards.

INTRODUCTION

The selection and formation of members, along with the active and ongoing utilization of a parish stewardship council under the support, oversight and direction of the pastor, is the single most important element in ensuring the ongoing life-long education, formation, conversion and facilitation of stewardship as a way of life within the lives of individual parishioners and the parish as a whole.

The active and ongoing utilization of a parish stewardship council should, in accordance with the unique mission and demographic characteristics of each parish, be structured and facilitated within the parish to recognize and emphasize that stewardship is a spiritual “way-of-life” response and conversion journey, and not only a process to raise funds.

This response and conversion journey calls each of us to gratefully recognize, receive, unfold and share our individual God given varied grace and giftedness in love of and service to God and neighbor.

The broad scope of responsibilities, including that of education, formation, and facilitation of the stewardship way-of-life conversion journey within the total parish community, suggests use of the term “council” rather than committee. The broad duties and responsibilities of the parish stewardship council should be viewed as being comparative in scope to that of the Parish Finance Council and Parish Pastoral Council. The scope of the Parish Stewardship Council should not be viewed as just another parish committee with a narrow purpose unrelated to the broad and overall vision and mission of the parish.

These three important councils should all be focused upon assuring and providing the appropriate sense of hospitality, prayer, formation and service while at the same time developing and maintaining broad unity within the parish community.

Those serving on a parish stewardship council should, in the course of ongoing intentional stewardship spirituality formation, experience and practice, seek to recognize, understand and accept the following basic principles and ideals of stewardship.

- **The call to discipleship**

In Baptism, the Sacrament of faith, and as strengthened by the power of the Holy Spirit in the Sacrament of Confirmation, all Christians are called to be disciples of Jesus Christ.

- **Who is a Christian disciple?**

“One who responds to Christ’s call, follows Jesus, and shapes his or her life in imitation of Christ’s.”

(Stewardship: A Disciples Response – pg. 9)

“Once one chooses to become a disciple of Jesus Christ, stewardship is not an option.”

(Stewardship: A Disciples Response – pg. 9)

- Who is a Christian steward?

“One who receives God’s gifts gratefully, cherishes and tends them in a responsible and accountable manner, shares them in justice and love with others, and returns them with increase to the Lord.”

(Stewardship: A Disciples Response – pg. 9)

“As each one has received a gift, use it to serve one another as good stewards of God’s varied grace.”

(1 Pt 4:10)

“Having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us use them: if prophecy, in proportion to our faith; if service, in our serving; he who teaches, in his teaching; he who exhorts, in his exhortation; he who contributes, in liberality; he who gives aid, with zeal; he who does acts of mercy, with cheerfulness.”

(Catechism of the Catholic Church #2004)

- What is Stewardship?

Stewardship is the grateful response of a Christian disciple who recognizes and receives God’s gifts and shares these gifts in love of God and neighbor.

(Catholic Diocese of Wichita)

“God is love, and he who abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him: (1 Jn 4:16). These words from the First Letter of John express with remarkable clarity the heart of the Christian faith; the Christian image of God and the resulting image of

mankind and its destiny. In the same verse, Saint John also offers a summary of the Christian life: We have come to know and to believe in the love God has for us.”

(God is Love [Deus Caritas Est] Encyclical Letter – Benedict XVI, pg 1)

“Since God has first loved us (cf. 1 Jn 4:10), love is now no longer a mere “command;” it is the response to the gift of love with which God draws near to us.”

(God is Love [Deus Caritas Est] Encyclical Letter – Benedict XVI, pg 2)

“Jesus makes charity the new commandment. By loving his own “to the end,” he makes manifest the Father’s love which he receives. By loving one another, the disciples imitate the love of Jesus which they themselves receive. Whence Jesus says: As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you; abide in my love. And again: This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you.”

(Catechism of the Catholic Church #2004)

“God is Love” and love is His first gift, containing all others.” “God’s love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.”

(Catechism of the Catholic Church #733)

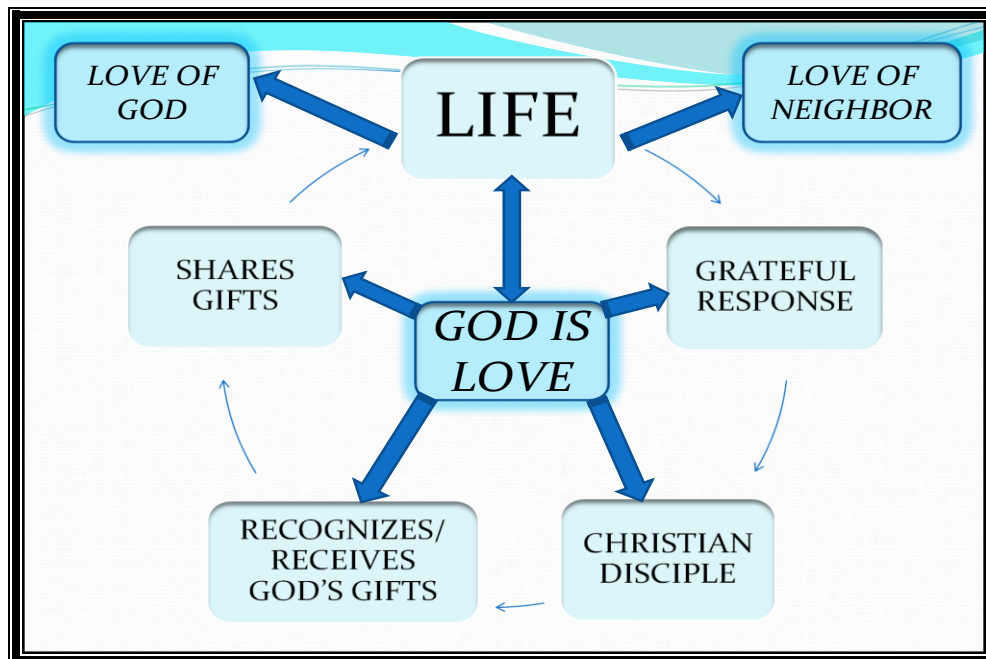
(1 Jn 4:8, 16) (Rom 5:5)

Within this first gift of Love, we are all given the gift of Life. Within this gift we are called to be Disciples of Christ. As disciples we are all called to action whereby:

“Stewardship, (discipleship in action) is the grateful response of a Christian disciple who recognizes and receives God’s gifts and shares these gifts in love of God and neighbor.”

(Definition of Stewardship - Catholic Diocese of Wichita)

See illustration of definition below:



The long-term success and results of facilitating the stewardship way of life concept, the formation of grateful hearts within the parish, depends primarily, if not totally, upon four important factors.

1. The understanding, support, witness, articulation of and conversion to Christian stewardship by the pastor, coupled with:
2. The formation of an active, spiritually committed and vision driven parish stewardship council. Appropriately empowered, this council seeks to bring the message and concept of Christian stewardship to life within the lives of parishioners and the broad parish community, encompassing all parish ministries, organizations and activities.

With the leadership of the pastor and his utilization of an active parish stewardship council, the parish:

3. Seeks, with the Eucharist as the focal point, to become the teacher of stewardship whereby the language, understanding and practice of stewardship is woven into the very fabric of the parish and the faith of its parishioners.
4. Cultivates that fertile soil within which the seeds of stewardship can be planted, tilled and harvested thus providing the invitation, encouragement, and opportunity for all to respond to their Baptismal call to discipleship. This assures their parish is viewed by all as a place of hospitality, prayer, formation and service.

Coinciding with the important role of the pastor and that of the parish stewardship council, there must be an understanding, appreciation and recognition of the following:

- **Who is a parishioner?**

Choosing to be a disciple of Jesus Christ, a parishioner registers and participates regularly and actively in the liturgical and social life of the parish community. The parishioner, as a steward, commits to share his/her gifts of time, talent and treasure, which are expressions of the very gift of self. Imitating Christ, who gave His life in love, the steward shares his/her life with other parishioners in service to the parish, thereby encouraging one another in this pilgrim journey to a life of holiness, recognizing that *“Stewardship is the grateful response of a Christian disciple who recognizes and receives God’s gifts and shares these gifts in love of God and neighbor.”*

- **What is a stewardship parish?**

A stewardship parish, within the unique demographics of each, seeks through regular participation in the celebration of the Eucharist, to spiritually form the lives of its parishioners. Parishioners, in turn, are invited, encouraged, sent forward and given the opportunity to become actively engaged and involved. This invitation, opportunity and involvement then tends to facilitate a real life experience and sense of hospitality, prayer, formation and service within the parish community while

recognizing that *“Stewardship is the grateful response of a Christian disciple who recognizes and receives God’s gifts and shares these gifts in love of God and neighbor.”*

- **United Catholic Stewardship?**

In the fall of 1985 the Diocese of Wichita implemented a diocesan-wide, spiritually based, stewardship way of life process titled, *“United Catholic Stewardship.”*

United in our Catholic faith, formed and responding as Christian disciples with grateful and generous hearts, individuals and families, young and old, within each parish were invited and encouraged to recognize, receive, share and return their God-given grace and giftedness in love of God and neighbor. It was to be the desired goal within each parish to instill a sense of hospitality, prayer, formation and service by first fulfilling the mission of each parish community, and in unity to extend that generosity, gratitude and service to the diocese and to the wider needs of the universal Church.

This unity in action was to:

- Recognize, strengthen and support the role of the family in the life of the Church.
- Stimulate and broaden local parish life, bringing about the formation and unity among parishioners as they share generously, sacrificially and proportionately their varied grace and God-given giftedness of time, talent and treasure.
- Provide the invitation, encouragement and opportunity for all to experience, respond to and fulfill their Baptismal call to discipleship.
- Identify, plan and provide for the needs of the parish community by establishing mission statements, related goals, objectives and action plans along with the pastoral and operational structure to facilitate, support and maintain the process.
- Recognize the parish as the primary and ordinary recipient of the sharing of our individual and family God-given giftedness from which the parish would support its mission while also proportionately sharing and providing for the ordinary and special needs of the diocese and the wider universal Church.

- **TOGETHER – We gather. We learn. We serve.**

As Bishop Jackels leads us forth together as a pilgrim people in the Diocese of Wichita, stewardship spirituality is very present in his mind. The TOGETHER Vision looks toward the future growth of our diocese. This vision is rooted in stewardship.

- Bishop Jackels seeks in this vision **to strengthen the oneness between parish and diocese.** We cannot forget that as stewards, we are stewards in our own individual life, in the life of our family, the life of our parish, the life of our diocese and the life of the universal Church. Stewardship is not a selfish, “It’s mine!” mentality, but a willingness to share what God has given for the good of the Church.
- Bishop Jackels seeks through the TOGETHER Vision **to deepen our practice of stewardship as a spiritual way of life,** sharing responsibility for the mission of the Church. This shared responsibility extends beyond any one particular person or parish.
- Inviting all of the people of the diocese **to fund seminarian education, Catholic formation programs and renovation of the Cathedral campus.** These extraordinary needs require the shared involvement of all of the people and parish families in the diocese.

Bishop Jackels is emphatic that even if we met financially all of the identified needs of the third goal stated above, without meeting the first two goals of strengthening the oneness between parish and diocese and deepening the practice of the spirituality of stewardship, then we have failed. *“Stewardship is the grateful response of a Christian disciple who recognizes and receives God’s gifts and shares these gifts in love of God and neighbor.”*

Characteristics of Parish Stewardship Council Members

In the process of recruiting and selecting parishioners to serve on the parish stewardship council experience and research suggests that members of the stewardship council should:

- **Be spiritually motivated individuals who:**

- are prayerfully motivated, committed to their Catholic faith and seek to, both privately and openly witness to and live that faith in the manner in which they respond, in action, to their Baptismal call to discipleship.
- recognize their God given grace and giftedness, and in gratitude strive to live a life of holiness.
- recognize *“The whole liturgical life of the Church revolves around the Eucharistic sacrifice and the sacraments.”*

(Catechism of the Catholic Church # 1113)
- are those within the parish community who most clearly reflect the eagerness and enthusiasm, and possess the energy and belief that it takes to invite, encourage and provide the opportunity for others to become involved in the process of living stewardship as a life-long way of life, serving the mission of the parish.
- represent all demographics of the parish including married couples (families), individual parishioners, youth, young adults, the elderly, sick, disabled, homebound, incarcerated, etc., and those representing the various cultures within the parish community. This diversity of council membership is important to assure that all aspects of parish life are provided the invitation and opportunity to actively respond to their Baptismal call to discipleship, serving and being served within the parish community.

- **Be actively involved in the parish**

Potential members of a parish stewardship council should be registered parishioners who are or have previously been actively involved in the parish as ministry leaders or volunteers.

- **Be knowledgeable of the mission, ministries, activities and demographics of the parish**

- Those being considered as potential parish stewardship council members should be parishioners who have broad knowledge and / or appreciation of the mission of the parish in terms of recognizing, within the demographics of the parish, the

ministries, activities, etc., necessary to meet and serve the needs of its parishioners.

- Potential council members should also be sensitive to and recognize the need to periodically survey or otherwise listen broadly to parishioners to be assured that their needs are being met, thus maintaining their involvement, support and commitment to the parish.

- **Exemplify the qualities of leadership, relationship, discipleship and stewardship**

In order to be effective parish stewardship council members, individuals must exemplify and witness to the spiritual and practical characteristics of leadership, relationship, discipleship and stewardship in their own lives as they seek to guide, direct and form others in what it means to be and live as Christian stewards serving the mission of their parish. Doing so requires the utilization, practice and linking of these four spiritual / practical characteristics:

- **Leadership:** From a spiritual perspective, parish stewardship council members must recognize God as their leader and be willing to follow behind Him and imitate His example.

“Who do people say that the Son of Man is?” They replied, “some say John the Baptist, others Elijah, still others Jeremiah or one of the prophets.” He said to them, “but who do you say that I am?” Simon Peter said in reply, “You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God.”

(Mt 16:13-16)

In addition to understanding the spiritual aspect of leadership, council members should necessarily possess the ability to guide, direct or influence others.

- **Relationship:** Prospective parish stewardship council members should recognize the importance and frequent practice of prayer as a covenant relationship between God and man in Christ.

(Catechism of the Catholic Church #2564)

Additionally, members of the parish stewardship council must recognize the importance of a proper ministry relationship between fellow council members, the pastor and the parish pastoral structure as they serve and carry out the mission of the parish in the true spirituality of stewardship.

- **Discipleship:** Those chosen to serve as parish stewardship council members must be mindful of their Baptismal call to discipleship recognizing that a Christian disciple is, *“One who responds to Christ’s call, follows Jesus, and shapes his or her life in imitation of Christ’s.”*

(Stewardship – A Disciple’s Response
U. S. Bishops’ Pastoral Letter on Stewardship)

Then Jesus said to his disciples, “whoever wishes to come after me must deny himself, take up his cross, and follow me. For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it.”

(Mt 16: 24-25)

Those seeking to or those selected to serve as parish stewardship council members must also recognize they are called to put their faith in action. They are to invite, encourage and seek to provide the opportunity for others to respond to their call to discipleship. Stewardship council members must be and serve as models for others to follow.

- **Stewardship:** Parish stewardship council members must recognize that the concept and practice of stewardship as a way of life is biblically based.

“As each one has received a gift, use it to serve one another as good stewards of God’s varied grace.”

(1 Pt 4:10)

Parish stewardship council members must recognize that the practice of stewardship, discipleship in action, teaches us that all “gift” is from God, beginning with the gift of life. Throughout the course of our God-given life, we are called, in action, to recognize, receive, and accept God’s varied grace and giftedness for the purpose for which it is being given, out of God’s never ending love for each of us.

In the course of this spiritual transformation of recognizing, receiving and accepting God’s gifts, parish stewardship council members must recognize the need for all to share those gifts generously, sacrificially and proportionately in love of God and neighbor.

- **Have the ability to envision where stewardship can take the parish**

Parish stewardship council members must be vision minded. They must recognize how the broad spiritual and practical aspects of living stewardship as a way of life can form and change the lives of individuals and families, while at the same time assuring their parish is, and will be, an ongoing viable and vibrant place meeting and sustaining the needs of parishioners and adjusting, as necessary, to changing demographics.

- **Be well organized and committed to serving on the council**

- Those being selected to serve on parish stewardship councils should be individuals who are well organized in terms of time management and in identifying and setting goals, objectives and related priorities necessary to facilitate an annual / ongoing, efficient and effective stewardship process in the parish.

- Selected individuals should be apprised of the commitment that will be necessary to facilitate the annual / ongoing process of education and formation as well as that of the preparation, response and follow-up phases of the annual parish stewardship renewal process.

- **Seek to implement accountability within the parish community**

The parish stewardship council members should, in concert with members of the parish pastoral council and the parish finance council, seek to keep the parish community broadly informed and apprised of the ministries, activities, etc., that are in place to serve the mission of the parish. This communication and reporting process should include statistics and information that will be meaningful and reflective of involvement, volunteerism and service, sending the message of thanks and appreciation.

- **Communicate that God's love (grace and giftedness) is ALL encompassing**

Recognize, practice and be comfortable in communicating that God's love (grace and giftedness) is encompassing of all we are, have and ever will be, and that all are therefore called to return and share in gratitude, generously, sacrificially and proportionately our time, talent and treasure in service to the mission of our parish, diocese and the wider universal Church.

Parish stewardship council members must recognize their individual Baptismal call to discipleship and be willingly and actively involved in the process of inviting, encouraging and providing the opportunities for all within the parish community to likewise respond to their call to discipleship serving the mission of the parish and the wider universal Church.

STRUCTURE

- **Selection process**

Within the structure of the Church all parish related councils, committees, ministries, etc., serve under the direction of and in an advisory capacity to the parish pastor. As such, the selection process for the parish stewardship council must be facilitated as determined by the pastor, keeping the following factors in mind.

Recognizing the desired characteristics of parish stewardship council members, those chosen to serve should be carefully interviewed, advised of the expectations and then, if deemed qualified by the pastor and / or selection committee, given the choice of accepting or rejecting the invitation to serve.

Once they have accepted the invitation to serve they can be selected by direct pastor appointment and / or then have their names placed in nomination to be voted upon by the pastor designated selection committee, electing the number of positions to be filled.

- **Leadership of the Council**

At the discretion of the parish pastor, he may choose to serve as the chairperson of the stewardship council or he may suggest and approve the process of selecting, under his direction, chairperson(s) and other officers of the Council. Those selected should be carefully chosen on the basis of their personal stewardship spirituality formation, witness to and general leadership qualities that will assure effective and ongoing stewardship formation and continuity within the parish community. Terms of leadership positions should generally follow and rotate within the guidelines for terms of service for all council members.

- **Size of Council**

The size of the council should be commensurate with the size and diversity of demographics within the parish community. It should be adequate in size to facilitate the annual and ongoing activities necessary to maintain an active stewardship formation and education process within the parish. The optimum size should take into account the importance of facilitating involvement of parishioners, who through their witness and experience will inspire others to follow in their footsteps.

- **Terms of Service**

Those selected / appointed to the parish stewardship council should be willing to commit to a minimum term of three years, with the opportunity to extend that term, if desired, to one additional three year term.

Terms of council membership should be staggered so as to assure ongoing understanding and knowledge of the tasks at hand. Based upon experience, the effectiveness of the parish stewardship council will be commensurate with commitment of time and formation / conversion on the part of its members. The annual and ongoing activities necessary to facilitate a successful parish stewardship process requires some ongoing continuity and bonding within the council membership. Frequent turnover and non active council members will result in a lack of necessary attention, commitment and focus on the task at hand to assure that the spirit, language and practice of stewardship is woven into the very fabric of the parish and its parishioners.

- **Meetings**

The frequency of meetings will be dependent upon the ongoing / seasonal duties and responsibilities assigned to the council. An active and committed parish stewardship council will, very likely, within the scope of duties including that of a well organized annual parish stewardship renewal process, find the necessity of regular monthly meetings.

These monthly meetings must necessarily include ongoing and prayerful formation of council members while also planning, evaluating, designing and carrying out the duties of the council, especially that of the annual three-phase parish stewardship renewal process.

FORMATION & EDUCATION

- **Spiritual Formation**

The initial and ongoing formation as to the concept and understanding of “*The Spirituality of Stewardship*” is of utmost importance. All members of the parish stewardship council must be willing and committed to attending and participating in a required process of stewardship formation as prescribed by the diocese.

This formational process as designed and presented by the diocesan Stewardship office may be scheduled on a parish-by-parish basis or in a regional parish setting as arranged by the diocese.

The format and agenda for this formational process will include a series of four DVD presentations, along with a related manual that will assist in facilitating group prayer, song, individual participation, questions and answers, and related activities.

The DVD and related manual can be obtained from the diocese and, if desired, presented by the pastor and / or selected parish stewardship council members.

It is important for this spiritual formation to be ongoing and renewed on some periodic basis to assure that newly selected council members are appropriately formed in “*The Spirituality of Stewardship.*”

As parish stewardship council members, it is important to understand that one cannot teach and form others if one is not living that which they seek to teach.

- **Interactive Bonding**

As with any council or committee, the membership consists of a variety of personalities, cultures, talents and opinions. In addition, one will typically find different levels of spirituality, education, and experience. With this potential and possible variety of traits and characteristics, it is imperative that the members of the council spend prayerful and quality time seeking to bond spiritually and socially to become “family” in the sense of knowing and understanding each other, including spouses who may not be serving on the council.

This manner of bonding will serve to provide a meaningful working relationship, understanding and appreciation of other council members and their sense of commitment to the parish. Bonding in this manner will also serve to avoid the potential for meetings to be nothing more than a meeting of strangers with no common vision or mission.

- **Continuing Education**

Pastors and parish stewardship council members should avail themselves of all available continuing education resources and opportunities including diocesan, regional and national seminars and / or conferences on the subject of stewardship.

BEST PRACTICES

- **Vision and Mission**

Every parish, in an ongoing manner, should strive to envision its future existence in providing and serving the needs of its parishioners. In order to be continually focused on this vision, it is important for every parish to establish its specific defined mission, that of identifying and responding to the fundamental, spiritual, social and particular demographic needs of its parish community.

To this end, it is the role of the parish stewardship council to collaborate with the parish pastoral council to create, facilitate and maintain a vibrant and viable stewardship parish through ongoing communication, conversation and practice that will provide and lead parishioners to a true and life-long stewardship way-of-life conversion, responding to their Baptismal call to discipleship.

In general, it should therefore be the goal of every parish, within its vision and mission, to assure that in the hearts, minds and eyes of all parishioners their parish is and / or seeks to truly become a place of *hospitality, prayer, formation* and *service*, where a stewardship way-of-life culture is woven into the very fabric of the parish.

- **Hospitality**

The parish community, in a variety of ways, can and does serve as an extension of the domestic church (the family) in providing the desired and necessary spiritual, educational and social needs that otherwise may not be available. This hospitality can, often times, provide the substance and glue necessary to keep individuals and families tied closely to their Catholic faith.

Intentional and active hospitality coupled with the opportunity for involvement fosters an enhanced sense of vested interest in the parish.

Every parish should seek to be sure that all parishioners, within the broad demographics of the parish, sense and recognize that they are invited, encouraged and provided the opportunity to be involved, thus feeling welcomed, served and appreciated.

- **Prayer**

In recognition that the textbook of stewardship is the Bible and the school of stewardship is the Mass, we are therefore provided with the Word and the sacramental grace that serves as the source and summit of our Catholic Faith.

In the process of stewardship formation and conversion, it is important to recognize the deep connection between the Eucharistic celebration and stewardship. In one of the prefaces of the Eucharistic prayers it says:

“Father, all powerful and ever-living God, we do well always and everywhere to give you thanks. You have no need of our praise, yet our desire to thank you is itself your gift. Our prayer of thanksgiving adds nothing to your greatness, but makes us grow in your grace, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.”

Discerning the Word and participating in the sacraments are all essential in our vocational call to holiness, that of responding to our Baptismal call to discipleship.

The parish stewardship council should seek to instill the power and importance of prayer in the hearts and minds of all parishioners.

Thus, it is important to provide and facilitate a variety of personal and communal prayer opportunities and related education within the parish. It is also through prayer and living the Mass that we learn to recognize, receive, accept and share God’s grace and giftedness in love of God and neighbor.

- **Formation**

“As the steward grows in the life of prayer, God reveals himself more intimately in this personal relationship. The steward also sees that the gifts received from God are to be shared and not buried. The steward remains deeply rooted in humility, recognizing that the gifts one has been given come not from self, but from God. Those gifts are to be shared with others.

This formation of each individual becomes part of the formation of the parish community. As members of the Body of Christ, the parish recognizes that it has a call from God to give and share His giftedness. Inherent within each individual is the need to give – to move from selfishness to selflessness. This formation is a life-long journey of conversion. As one grows more deeply in this formation in a life of stewardship, the more deeply one loves as God loves us. This is true for the individual steward and for the stewardship parish.”

**(The Pillars of Parish Stewardship –
Catholic Diocese of Wichita)**

Ongoing prayer, education and communication are the factors necessary in fostering and strengthening the stewardship conversion process. This formation process should importantly seek to weave the language and practice of stewardship into the very fabric of the parish.

- **Service**

At the very heart of Christian stewardship is the act of service.

“Mature disciples make a conscious, firm decision, carried out in action, to be followers of Jesus Christ no matter the cost to themselves. Beginning in conversion, change of mind and heart, this commitment is expressed not in a

single action nor even in a number of actions over a period of time, but in an entire way of life. It means committing one's self to the Lord.”

*(Stewardship – A Disciple's Response
U. S. Bishops' Pastoral Letter on Stewardship)*

A stewardship parish seeks to be that common faith community within which parishioners are invited and have the opportunity to serve and be served, giving, receiving and sharing their God-given giftedness. It is through the pillar of service at the parish or broader community level that a Christian steward is provided the opportunity to respond, in action, to his / her call to discipleship individually and / or collectively.

It is therefore the role of the parish and its stewardship council to be attentive to the needs of parishioners and in turn to provide the opportunity for its parishioners to respond in gratitude and action in recognition of the gifts they have received.

- **Duties and Responsibilities**

The duties and responsibilities of a parish stewardship council, although similar in nature, may vary depending upon size, location and demographics of each parish. Notwithstanding these varied factors, the work and scope of the duties and responsibilities of the council, by necessity and scaled accordingly, will be basically the same.

The following are those important duties, responsibilities and related best practices that have proven to be essential in facilitating viable, vibrant and successful stewardship parishes.

- **Education and Formation**

Of primary importance is the task of using whatever means, resources and practices that are available to facilitate an ongoing and life-long process of education and formation in what it means to be and live as a Christian disciple. This education and formation must be predicated upon the Bible, the textbook of stewardship, and the Mass, the school of stewardship.

This education and formation must importantly target parish ministry leaders and teachers, for one cannot teach or witness what he / she is not living. Likewise, it is important for the language and practice of stewardship to become second nature and woven into the very fabric of the parish.

Stewardship threaded into homilies, or homilies specifically targeting the subject of stewardship, should be planned and intentional. There are few weekly readings or gospels where there is not some thread of stewardship woven in. The ongoing practice of homilies touching upon the subject of stewardship or including the

language of stewardship will greatly assist in causing the subject to be understood positively as a response to the Baptismal call to discipleship, rather than negatively understood as only a way to raise funds. Homilies reflecting upon the spirituality of stewardship also serve to reflect the pastor's understanding and support of the importance of stewardship in the lives of parishioners and their parishes.

During the course of the annual parish stewardship renewal process the general intercessions / prayers of the faithful should include prayers directed towards the success of the renewal process and the ongoing stewardship conversion process of parishioners.

It is also vitally important to integrate the spirituality and practice of stewardship into the religious education curriculums in parish elementary and secondary schools and / or religious education programs (CCD – PSR).

Resources and materials to assist in this formation are available from a variety of sources including that of the diocesan Stewardship Office, the United States Catholic Conference of Bishops, the International Catholic Stewardship Council and other excellent web sites and publishers of stewardship materials. Refer to the “Resources” section of this handbook for available resources.

- **Communication**

The process of education and formation entails the need for a variety of ongoing methods of effective communication.

- **Newsletters:** A monthly or other periodic newsletter can be an effective communication tool for the purpose of keeping parishioners informed while also inviting, encouraging and providing the opportunity for all to become involved in the activities, ministries and mission of the parish. A well designed, attractive and frequently published newsletter can greatly enhance the image of a parish.

The size and demographics of a parish will dictate the overall effort necessary to publish and distribute a parish newsletter. A periodic newsletter, no matter the size or demographics of the parish, is a very important tool in keeping parishioners connected with the ministries, activities and parish community in general.

Newsletters also provide for the opportunity to publish articles reflecting how parishioners are witnesses to others in the manner in which they are living and practicing the stewardship way of life. Newsletter articles should seek to mention, over time, as many parishioners as possible.

There are a variety of ways to distribute and / or mail parish newsletters. Parishes that are serious about stewardship and evangelization will seek to be sure that the newsletter is made available to all registered households. The

most desirable distribution process is that of mailing the newsletter to all households, the results of which will be commensurate with the cost.

In the new age of electronic communication, e-newsletters are becoming popular and very cost effective. Newsletters can also be made available on the parish web site.

- **Bulletin Inserts:** The ongoing practice of including stewardship bulletin inserts in the weekly parish bulletin is important to keep the message of stewardship fresh in the minds of parishioners. The bulletin inserts (quotes) will also frequently be tied to scripture which helps in keeping the message of stewardship biblically based.
- **Stewardship Brochures:** A variety of stewardship brochures and materials should be made available. The publishers of these brochures and materials are identified in the resource section of this handbook. Many parishes have these brochures and materials on display and available for parishioners to take home.
- **Parish Ministry Directory / Booklet:** The regular publication and / or revision of a Parish Ministry Directory / Booklet can be one of the most important methods of communication within a parish. This is not to be confused with a parish pictorial directory.

A Parish Ministry Directory / Booklet can effectively serve a parish in a variety of ways. It can serve to provide a broad spectrum of information and facts about the parish. As the title of the document infers, it should specifically identify and describe all of the ministries, activities, groups, their purpose and other services being provided to serve the needs of the parish community. It should include the names, phone numbers and perhaps the e-mail addresses of the current leaders / chairpersons of the ministries, etc. It should suggest and encourage parishioners to become involved as a way of responding to their Baptismal call to discipleship.

The size and format of this directory will vary dependent upon the size and demographics of the parish. It is extremely important to keep the directory revised and up to date, reflecting current facts and information about those who are serving as leaders / chairpersons of the various ministries, etc.

- **Lay Witness Presentations:** One of the most effective methods of stewardship communication, formation and conversion is that of providing for and scheduling stewardship lay witness presentations.

A lay witness presentation is that given by an individual, couple, family, youth or young adult testifying to the impact that stewardship as a way of life has had on their lives, that of their family and perhaps their parish.

Witness presentations can be given at any time during the year. Typically these presentations are most effective when given during the parish's annual stewardship renewal process.

Individuals chosen to give witness presentations are those who are typically known for their example, commitment to and active practice of their faith.

Lay witness presentations are most effective when the presenters are truly speaking from the heart, reflecting their personal experience and conversion. The formality and style of presentation will be overshadowed by the sincerity of the presentation.

There are a variety of basic elements to be included in a witness presentation. Materials and information to assist in the preparation and delivery of a witness presentation are available from the diocesan Stewardship Office.

The parish stewardship council should, under the direction of the pastor, assist in the selection and training of witness presenters.

- **Welcoming Committee:** In cooperation with the parish pastoral council, the parish stewardship council should encourage and assist in the design, implementation and facilitation of a new parishioner welcoming process. It is important that this process provide new and prospective members with broad information relative to the overall mission, ministries and activities of the parish, appropriately inviting them to become and remain actively involved. This effort should seek to be sure that all parishioners sense and recognize that they are invited, encouraged and given the opportunity to be involved, thus allowing them to feel welcomed, served and appreciated.

Experience and research confirms that the effort and the number of ongoing parish welcoming activities will have a profound and measurable impact on parish life and the resulting generous and sacrificial support of its parishioners through the sharing of their time, talent and treasure. The results will be commensurate with the effort put forth to welcome and greet parishioners.

These upfront and ongoing efforts provide the opportunity to not only welcome parishioners, but to also invite and encourage their involvement, while also communicating the expectations of parishioners in carrying out the mission of the parish.

◇ **Registering New Parishioners**

Assist the parish pastoral council in cooperation with the pastor in scheduling periodic opportunities for new parishioners to register in the parish. These opportunities could be scheduled once a month following all weekend Masses with a welcoming committee table available in the church gathering space or other suitable location at the parish.

Those seeking to register would be provided with the parish designed registration form(s) to be completed and returned to the parish.

◇ **New Parishioner Receptions**

The scheduling of periodic new parishioner receptions provides the opportunity to more formally greet and welcome newly registered parishioners. These events, perhaps scheduled on a quarterly or other regular basis, can be held following a particular weekend Mass or they can be scheduled in the evening. Newly registered parishioners would be formally invited to attend at which time there would be wine, cheese and / or other food available while listening to short presentations by the pastor and key parish ministry chairpersons.

This important welcoming activity can be organized and facilitated jointly by the parish stewardship council, parish pastoral council and welcoming committee.

◇ **Welcoming Packet**

At the same time, the welcoming committee would provide a “welcoming packet” that might include some or all of the following:

- A letter greeting the new parishioners from the Pastor that might also reflect upon active parishioner expectations and / or other parish guidelines.
- A parish ministry / activity booklet, if available, reflecting all of the active ministries, activities and groups within the parish along with a current list of chairpersons and information on how to become involved.
- Any special flyers of parish ministries that might be of help or information for new parishioners.
- It would be helpful and informative to include a current copy of the parish pastoral council structure, if available.
- Some parishes will include a small gift of some type as an additional expression of appreciation for their registering and joining the parish.

◇ **Mass Greeters**

The use of Mass greeters is a very simple, yet effective, welcoming activity. The presence of individuals or families at church entrances to

greet those arriving to attend Mass has been proven to have a profound impact on parishioners and visitors.

This important welcoming activity provides an added opportunity to volunteer one's time to be present before Mass to welcome, greet and perhaps answer any questions from parishioners and / or visitors. This simple act of hospitality serves to reflect a welcoming spirit to the parish while also demonstrating a gentle sense of caring and compassion for every individual who enters the church to participate in the liturgy and sacrament of the Eucharist.

The parish stewardship council should, in connection with the parish pastoral council, seek to provide the opportunity for parishioners to volunteer to provide this important parish welcoming activity.

- **Ministry Fairs:** A ministry fair is an annual, or other periodic, well planned parish event that can effectively communicate and display, in a festive and social atmosphere, the variety and broad scope of ministries, activities and groups serving the needs of parishioners that are available within the parish community.

This event will provide the opportunity for all parish ministries, activities and/or groups to display and communicate their existence and purpose and give the opportunity for those interested to become actively involved through the volunteering of their time and talent.

A parish ministry fair can be very effective when planned and facilitated during the annual parish stewardship renewal process. It is during this renewal period when parishioners are being invited to prayerfully and consciously discern how they are recognizing, receiving and sharing their time and talent in service to their parish community.

A parish ministry fair must be well organized with specific emphasis on how to attract individuals and families to the event. A variety of fun events, contests and children's activities will typically draw parishioners to the fair.

- **The Annual Parish Stewardship Renewal Process**

The overall success of stewardship within the parish community will be highly dependent upon the annual commitment to a parish stewardship renewal process.

During the season of Lent we are all annually called, in a penitential manner through prayer, fasting and almsgiving, to dwell upon our journey to holiness developing a deeper faith life. It is in this same prayerful and conscious fashion that we should annually discern the manner in which we are responding to our Baptismal call to discipleship. We are reminded of this call and the conditions of discipleship in Mt 16:24 *“Whoever wishes to come after me must deny himself, take up his cross, and follow me.”*

The annual parish stewardship renewal process provides the opportunity to prayerfully and conscientiously consider the manner in which we, as individuals, are or are not responding to our call to discipleship. It is through this annual examination of conscience that we are to prayerfully recognize, receive and accept our God-given giftedness and then determine how we will generously and sacrificially share that giftedness in love of God and neighbor.

A well designed / organized and effective parish stewardship renewal process will necessarily entail an organized three-phase period of preparation, call to commitment and the ever important follow-up.

This three phase process can, depending upon the overall planning, preparation, renewal, follow-up, evaluation and desired expectations, entail an overall period of up to nine months to complete, if done correctly. This committed period of time may vary depending upon the size and demographics of the parish. The results will be commensurate with the time and effort put forth.

The Diocese of Wichita distributes to all parish pastors and identified parish stewardship council chairpersons an annually prepared and updated “*Parish Stewardship Renewal Schedule and Guidelines.*” This is also made available on the diocesan web site www.cdowk.org (Stewardship Office Web Pages).

This annual renewal process in the Diocese of Wichita is designed to begin in June of each year and will be, for the most part, completed during the first calendar quarter of the ensuing year.

- **The Preparation Phase:** For those parishes beginning for the first time, the pastor and parish stewardship council will want to carefully review the Renewal Schedule and Guidelines.

For those parishes who already have experience with the annual renewal process, the pastor and parish stewardship council should first take steps to evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of the past process to determine what, if any, procedures and / or practices need to be revised to enhance the results.

In either case, for those parishes just beginning or those who have previous renewal processes in place, a calendar (date specific, timeline) preferably as recommended by the diocese, should be planned and scheduled by each parish.

The Preparation Phase typically begins during the month of June each year and is completed and ready for the Call to Commitment Phase (near the end of October) that begins four (4) weeks in advance of Stewardship Response Sunday, which is always the Sunday prior to the Thanksgiving holiday.

In conjunction with the parish pastoral council, the parish stewardship council, under the direction of the pastor, should design, prepare and print time and

talent (Call to Commitment) forms that are customized to support the mission, ministries and activities of the parish. The time and talent forms should be user friendly, easily understood and recognized as a means of calling all parishioners to action in serving the needs of the parish community, thus responding to their call to discipleship.

The use and completion of treasure commitment forms must also be encouraged, providing the opportunity for parishioners (households) to generously, sacrificially and proportionately pledge and commit their financial resources.

Please refer to the current year Annual Parish Stewardship Renewal Schedule and Guidelines for assistance and support in the printing and supplying of parish customized time and talent forms, along with diocesan provided treasure commitment forms and related supplies.

During the Preparation Phase, parishes will want to schedule and plan lay witness presentations, ministry fairs, bulletin / newsletter articles and what steps may be taken to communicate the stewardship message through homilies, the school classrooms, PSR (CCD) classes, RCIA, etc.

The Preparation Phase is also that period of time in which the parish stewardship council will want to plan and design the process of preparing, assembling, mailing and / or distributing the time, talent and treasure “call to commitment” forms to parishioners. Consideration should be given to using the distribution method that will maximize distribution to all parish households.

- **The Call to Commitment Phase:** The Call to Commitment Phase will typically begin approximately four (4) weeks in advance of Stewardship Response Sunday (the Sunday just prior to the Thanksgiving holiday).

During this four week period a variety of educational and formational activities and events should be scheduled.

The Bishop of the Diocese will prepare and mail his annual stewardship message to all registered households, inviting and encouraging the laity to prayerfully discern their God-given varied grace and giftedness, and to consciously consider how they will, in gratitude, recognize, receive and share that grace and giftedness in love of God and neighbor, serving the needs of their family, parish, diocese and the wider universal Church.

The mailing and / or other distribution of the parish “Call to Commitment” forms and related materials should take place in early November, within one to two weeks in advance of Stewardship Response Sunday.

Pastors should plan and deliver their homilies on the spirituality of stewardship, the broad aspects of stewardship, and the action of responding to the individual call to discipleship.

Lay witness presentations will be scheduled during the Call to Commitment Phase. These can be in addition to and following the pastor's homily, or they can be presented at the end of Mass, as determined by the pastor.

Stewardship bulletin notices and newsletter articles on the subject of stewardship can be effective during the Call to Commitment Phase.

In conjunction with homilies, lay witness presentations, etc., parishioners should be informed of the importance and purpose of their annual need to prayerfully reflect on their stewardship and complete and return their time, talent and treasure "Call to Commitment" forms on Stewardship Response Sunday.

On Stewardship Response Sunday, the pastor should sincerely convey his thanks and that of the parish to those who have completed and returned their "Call to Commitment" forms. At the same time, he should invite and encourage those who have not yet completed their forms to please do so as soon as possible.

- **The Follow-up Phase:** The very important Follow-up Phase begins immediately following Stewardship Response Sunday.

As the "Call to Commitment" forms are being received from parishioners, it is the work of the parish stewardship council to be actively involved as follows:

All data (names, addresses and commitments of time and talent) should be documented on paper or electronically in an organized fashion, so the stewardship council is in a position to promptly send general thank you notices to all respondents and to document all commitments of time and talent by ministry, activity, etc. The documentation of ministry and activity commitments is necessary in order to be able to promptly provide, in cooperation with the parish pastoral council, all ministry and activity committee chairpersons with the names, addresses, etc., of those who have volunteered.

It then becomes the responsibility of those chairpersons or designated committee / activity members to promptly communicate with the volunteers to again thank them and to invite their service, identify how they may become involved or have been assigned to volunteer according to their completed Call to Commitment forms.

Completed treasure Call to Commitment pledge forms are typically counted for statistical and trend purposes and then turned over to the parish finance council for their recording and monitoring purposes. The pastor and / or the

parish finance council may also want to send a thank you to all those who returned completed Call to Commitment treasure forms.

It has been said and proven that the lack of or overly delayed thank you communication to those parishioners who have completed and submitted Call to Commitment time, talent and treasure forms is equivalent to stewardship suicide. In the absence of such communication, those parishioners are not apt to consider completing Call to Commitment forms.

The follow-up process will include the necessity of communication and / or contact with those parishioners who have not yet completed and submitted their time, talent and treasure Call to Commitment forms. It is important to make at least one additional effort to invite and encourage those who have not responded to complete and submit their forms. This contact will necessarily need to be done in a gentle fashion, stressing the spiritual aspects of stewardship and reminding those individuals of their Baptismal call to discipleship and that “once one chooses to become a disciple of Jesus Christ, stewardship is not an option.” This follow-up request can also serve as a reminder of the expectations of an active parishioner.

At the close of the Follow-up Phase, it is again a good time for the parish stewardship council to review and evaluate the process and results, identifying any important strengths and weaknesses that should be documented for reference and attention during the next parish stewardship renewal Preparation Phase.

○ **Appreciation and Accountability**

- **Stewardship Appreciation Event(s):** The success of stewardship in the lives of individuals and their parishes can be greatly enhanced through a well planned and ongoing process of expressing thanks and appreciation to those who are actively involved, engaged and committed to the stewardship way of life process within and beyond their parish community. The important habit of saying “thank you” as we were taught by our parents, is equally important later in life as we frequently express appreciation to those who are giving generously, sacrificially and proportionately of their God-given giftedness in service to their parish. In the stewardship formation process one cannot say thank you enough.

Special annual and / or periodic social events (e.g. parish dinners, picnics, etc.) should be planned and scheduled to appropriately reflect the appreciation due to those who are actively involved in the ministry, activities and support of the parish. Events of this nature and purpose will typically result in a renewed sense of involvement and support while also building upon and sustaining a unique and ongoing spirit of stewardship within the parish community.

- **Accountability:** Stewardship appreciation events provide an excellent opportunity to report and share information and statistics reflecting the state of the parish, financial statistics, ministry and activity reports, volunteer numbers, volunteer hours, volunteer opportunities, ministry activities, future plans, etc.

- **Parish Pastoral Planning**

Parish pastoral planning provides parishes with the opportunity to discern, address and identify the mission of the parish. The specific mission of each parish will vary depending upon its varied and unique demographics.

The parish stewardship council should work hand in hand with the parish pastoral council, assuring that the spiritual, educational and social needs of the parishioners are being met. The parish pastoral council should be attentive to making sure that there is a well defined and active parish pastoral structure in place to facilitate and implement the mission of the parish.

Research reflects that parishioners, in many cases, may not be actively involved in their parishes because they do not feel welcomed and their needs are not being met.

The process of periodic and well planned parish pastoral planning provides the opportunity to listen carefully and to react accordingly in carrying out a defined parish pastoral plan including goals and objectives that are measurable, periodically reviewed and effective in facilitating the mission of the parish.

RESOURCES

- A. **The Bible**
- B. **Catechism of the Catholic Church (CCC)**
- C. **Stewardship – A Disciple’s Response**
 - **A Pastoral Letter on Stewardship**
United States Conference of Catholic Bishops
USCCB Publishing
3211 Fourth St. NE
Washington, DC 20017-1194
Phone 800-235-8722
Website www.usccb.org
- D. **Stewardship Spirituality**
 - **A DVD and accompanying workbook to assist in the education and formation of stewardship spirituality.**
Catholic Diocese of Wichita
Office of Stewardship
424 N. Broadway
Wichita, KS 67202
Phone 316-269-3900
Website www.cdowk.org
- E. **Stewardship – Disciples Respond**
 - **A Practical Guide for Pastoral Leaders**
International Catholic Stewardship Council
1275 K Street, NW, Suite 880
Washington, DC 20005-4077
Phone 202-289-1093
Website www.catholicstewardship.org
- F. **Stewardship – A Parish Handbook**
 - **By: C. Justin Clements**
Liguori Publications
One Ligouri Drive
Ligouri, MO 63057-9999
Phone 800-325-9521
Website www.liguori.org
- G. **Time, Talent & Treasure**
 - **Reflections on the U. S. Bishops’ Model for Parish Stewardship**
Liguori Publications
One Ligouri Drive
Ligouri, MO 63057-9999
Phone 800-325-9521
Website www.liguori.org
- H. **Best Practices in Parish Stewardship**
 - **By: Charles E. Zech**

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200 Noll Plaza
Huntington, IN 46750
Phone 800-348-2886
Website www.osv.com

I. Characteristics of a Stewardship Parish

- Catholic Diocese of Wichita
Office of Stewardship
424 N. Broadway
Wichita, KS 67202
Phone 316-269-3900
Website www.cdowk.org

J. The Pillars of Parish Stewardship

- Catholic Diocese of Wichita
Office of Stewardship
424 N. Broadway
Wichita, KS 67202
Phone 316-269-3900
Website www.cdowk.org

K. God is Love – Deus Caritas Est

- **Benedict XVI – Encyclical Letter**
United States Conference of Catholic Bishops
USCCB Publishing
3211 Fourth St. NE
Washington, DC 20017-1194
Phone 800-235-8722
Website www.usccb.org

L. On Christian Hope – Spe Salvi

- **Benedict XVI – Encyclical Letter**
United States Conference of Catholic Bishops
USCCB Publishing
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Phone 800-235-8722
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M. Our Sunday Visitor (For a variety of stewardship materials)

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N. Catholic Diocese of Wichita – Web Site

- www.cdowk.org

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