



Stewardship: God's Call and Our Response

Core Community Meeting

Aim

This meeting will delve into the spiritual foundation of stewardship by allowing the members of the Parish Core Community to explore three objectives:

- to recall their own gifts and how these gifts are connected to ongoing discipleship
- to brainstorm ways to help parishioners see stewardship in a spiritual context
- to discuss concrete ways to draw spiritual strength for parish services and ministries

Leader's Instructions:

This meeting requires a commitment to reflective silence. It would also be appropriate to place a nicely wrapped gift on a prayer table. Ask for two people to read the Opening Prayer and the Closing Prayer.

Ask someone to prepare the Scripture reading and, in the actual reading, to read the text twice, followed by a pause for silent reflection. Before the reading, ask participants to listen for a meaningful phrase and to contemplate its message as a response to the text.

Opening Prayer

Lord God, we gather together in your name. We acknowledge your loving presence among us. We ask you to help us recognize the many gifts we have received from you. We thank you, in particular, for inviting us to serve you. Guide us as we seek to use our own gifts more fully and to empower others to use theirs. Be with us as we deepen our understanding of all that you call us to be. We ask this through your son, Jesus Christ, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God forever and ever. Amen.

Reading 1 Corinthians 12: 4–12

Leader's Reflection

Imagine what the gifts under a Christmas tree might look like when a large extended family gets together to celebrate this holy day. There would be many presents of all sizes and shapes. There would be gifts in a variety of wrappings—some clothed with exquisite paper and delicate ornaments, some bundled in simple, sale-priced paper, and some unassumingly hidden underneath the pile. Guessing what's inside is one of the most enjoyable parts of gift giving.

Now let's take the experience of our imaginary Christmas tree into daily life and the workings of our parish. Did you rush downstairs this morning to see what gifts and blessings awaited you? Did you

appreciate the food you ate for breakfast, or the car in your driveway, or even the members of your family? Do you view ministry as an opportunity to explore the gifts you have been given in the Body of Christ? Unfortunately, it is much easier to think in terms of personal needs and obligations. It is much too tempting to see only obstacles to happiness and to concentrate our energies on what we do not have.

So let's step back for a minute and think about God as a gift giver. What has God given us? Take an imaginary walk through a room of your house and thank God for each item you see. (*You may want to pause for a moment.*) Now let's take the time to thank God for each family member and for all of our associates at work. (*Pause.*) Each day is a new incarnation of God's love; and, if this is true, then it is appropriate to ask: "What *hasn't* God given us?"

We could reflect on any one of our personal blessings from God—life, health, family, work, food, the sunrise, and friends. But let's listen to St. Paul. In his letter to the Romans, Paul reminds us of our greatest gift and challenges us to have confidence about all other gifts and needs. He says, "...God is for us.... He who did not withhold his own Son, but gave him up for all of us, will he not...give us everything else?" (Romans 8:31–32). Paul also says, "To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good" (I Corinthians 12:7). If we turn that sentence around, we hear that God gives each of us a sharing in the Spirit as well as a gift we are invited to use for the benefit of the community. We did not earn these gifts. They have been freely given by the loving God.

Once we accept God's love as real and tangible, we must ask the next question: How do we treat these gifts from God? Are we drawn to a deeper life of discipleship out of gratitude for God's greatest gift? Do we strive to make all that we are and own available to Jesus? Do we see ourselves as stewards over the immense fortune of God's love, called to keep watch over and to spend the gifts God has given us for the sake of his people, giving our whole lives, all we own, all we do, even every minute of our time. Do we grasp ourselves as keepers of particular gifts "just as the Spirit chooses?"¹

And, then, how do we as leaders empower others to use their particular gifts "for the common good?"² Paul lists some of the gifts he saw in his community in Corinth. It becomes our responsibility to be like Paul in recognizing and calling forth the Spirit's gifts in our community.

Small Group Sharing

1. What phrase was meaningful for you as you listened to the opening Scripture?
2. What experiences help you feel gifted? What brings you to appreciate others' gifts?
3. What concrete decisions can we make as disciples and followers of Jesus that will give us new strength in serving others?
4. How are stewardship and discipleship understood in our parish?

Business Meeting Agenda

1. Review previous meeting's minutes and actions.
2. Brainstorm ways to introduce this topic to small Christian communities and the parish.
 - a. Encourage various groups to reflect on the gifts of their members.
 - b. Foster the practice of prayer and Scripture reading as essential parts of every stewardship planning meeting.
 - c. Encourage parish committees and discussion groups to use the U.S. Catholic Bishops' pastoral letter, *Stewardship: A Disciple's Response*.
<http://www.usccb.org/opps/stewardship.htm>
 - d. Purchase and promote videos that reflect the relationship between discipleship and service, such as: *Sister Thea: Her Own Story* <http://www.videoswithvalues.org/education/thea.html>, *Entertaining Angels: The Dorothy Day Story*, <http://www.videoswithvalues.org/family/entang.html> and *Pierre Toussaint (Saints in the Making)* <http://www.pauline.org/store/moreinfo/stsinthemaking.html>
 - e. Invite groups to download and use the workshop, "Stewardship: God's Call and Our Response," from www.parishlife.com.

3. If the workshop is chosen as an activity, consider the following:
 - a. Should we consult with any groups or individuals in the parish who might not be represented at this meeting?
 - b. Plan the workshop before the parish stewardship program begins or as a way of deepening the parish's understanding of stewardship.
 - c. Decide who will facilitate the workshop and who will be invited.
 - d. Strategize how to introduce the workshop to the parish. Should we ask RENEW International for a consultant as we proceed? (Contact Mike Fabian at SCCServices@renewintl.org, or 908-769-5400.)
 - e. Assign tasks to individual members or subgroups. Schedule a follow-up meeting to assess progress of various tasks assigned.
4. Discuss other agenda items that are part of the normal business of the Parish Core Community.

Closing Prayer

(Invite spontaneous prayers or petitions. Close with the following prayer.)

God, our Father, we are grateful for the many gifts our community has received from you. Through the power of your Holy Spirit, we depend on you for the gifts of faith, wisdom, kindness, and patience. Help us draw more deeply from the well of your love. Guide us as we lead others to the living waters of your presence among us. Give us the strength to respond to the needs around us as compassionate disciples of Jesus. Be with us as we learn what it means to be good stewards for the sake of the world and on behalf of all creation. We ask this through Jesus Christ, your Son. Amen.

¹ 1 Corinthians 12:11.

² 1 Corinthians 12:7.