

DIOCESE OF JOLIET  
PLANNED PARISH OFFERING PROGRAM

“THANK YOU GOD”

DEPARTMENT OF DEVELOPMENT AND STEWARDSHIP  
ST. CHARLES PASTORAL CENTER  
101 W. AIRPORT ROAD  
ROMEDEVILLE, ILLINOIS 60446

The Diocese of Joliet Planned Parish Offering Program's purpose is to form parishioners in an understanding and practice of true scriptural self-giving, to develop them as grateful givers, and to enable and expand the mission of the parish.

The Planned Parish Offering Program provides an opportunity each year to express thanks to the parish community for their generosity throughout the previous year and to invite even greater self-giving in the year to come. This allows many of the current ministries of the parish to be sustained and provides for expansion into new ministry areas.

It is much more likely to develop great giving when a parish does a thorough job in planning and communications. Planning is important because it creates a clear vision and action plan for the parish. Why does the parish need money? Why does the parishioner need to give? Oftentimes this solid plan translates into improved ministry, which affects giving levels. And, increased giving enables ministries to be improved. Finally, the planning process is valuable to development. Studies show that when people feel informed and involved in the direction-setting process of an organization, they are much more likely to give generously.

Communications is important as a means to form and inform parish members. Using basic tools such as the bulletin, parish paper, pulpit, letters, the annual report, envelope mailings and web site, a parish can help its members to feel a greater sense of commitment and belonging as well as increased understanding and enthusiasm for the future. These factors of planning, ministry, communications and giving are key to the success of an integrated parish development program.

### Benefits Of The Planned Parish Offering Program

- *Personalized* annual solicitation/communication with ALL registered parishioners
- Identification of major parish contributors  
(*"A" and "B" Segmented Parishioner-Groups*)
- Opportunity to clean up parish records
- Increases parishioner awareness of parish finances
- Enhances parish planning and budgeting process
- Increases annual offertory support
- Initiates a *Development* mentality with regard to parish support
- Promotes concepts of *stewardship* such as gratitude and accountability
- Increases offertory collections, on average, 25-38%

## PLANNED PARISH OFFERING PROGRAM

*(An appeal for increased offerings through the Sunday Offering Collection)*

The Planned Parish Offering Program is conducted over a three-week period and includes a homily presentation by the pastor and lay witness presentations by individual parishioners. Following these homily presentations, a personalized, segmented mailing is sent to all parish households. This program can be adapted each year for use as part of a parish's *annual stewardship appeal*; that time when we make a return to God with increase (to the parish) of a proportionate share of our treasure (financial resources). The following is a comprehensive description of the program:

### Weekend #1 Pastor Introduction

The program is introduced on the first weekend with a homily presentation by the pastor at all Masses. The pastor's presentation is general and emphasizes themes of stewardship such as gratitude, sharing and accountability. This is an opportunity for the pastor to call parishioners to a greater awareness of the need for their participation in all areas of parish life, including the financial support of the parish. The homily becomes specific when the pastor explains the financial state of the parish. In this context, the relationship between the weekly Offertory collection and the operating budget of the parish is detailed.

The following week all registered parishioners receive a personalized letter from the pastor, restating the themes of his homily, with a special request for new, renewed and/or increased financial support (the gift of one's treasure) through the Sunday offertory collection. The mailing can be segmented if you wish into various parishioner groups (regular and non-regular contributors, school families and parents of children enrolled in religious education classes, for example). The segmented letters have a specific request for participation and support depending on the targeted audience and may indicate a parishioner's record of giving through the offertory collection for a certain period of time.

### WEEKEND #2- LAY WITNESS TALKS

On the second weekend parishioners give a *witness talk* about their involvement in the parish and how they have come to a greater understanding of stewardship and the importance of giving back to God through the gift of their time, talent and treasure. Speakers might be identifiable parish leaders, school families and/or a long-time member of the parish—a parishioner who lives his/her faith commitment and can motivate others to become involved in parish life. Lay witnesses understand the concepts of gratitude, sharing, accountability and making a return with increase to God. (*Stewardship: An Overview*).

Lay witnesses might explain how the parish meets the varied needs of its members through its varied ministries and programs (liturgy, the sacraments, school and religious education for kids and adults, etc.), and then explain how these services are supported through weekly donations received through the Sunday offertory collection.

During the second week, parishioners receive another letter from the pastor that reiterates those ideas expressed at all the Masses the previous weekend. This letter can include a copy of the witness talk, or a special guide for parishioners to use to determine regular ongoing offertory support. A commitment card and return envelope is enclosed in this mailing. As part of the letter, the pastor asks that parishioners make a faith commitment of their financial support to the parish by completing the commitment card and returning it to the rectory in the envelope provided.

### *Weekend #3 Commitment Weekend*

On the third weekend, the celebrant recaps many of the themes of the previous two weekends and thanks those who have already returned their commitment card to the rectory, making an outward commitment of their support to the parish. Time is then made available after the homily for those others who have not already done so to complete their commitment card and place it in the collection basket if they wish.

#### Program Follow-Up

A month or so following the stewardship of treasure campaign has been initiated, the pastor sends a personalized thank you letter to those parishioners who completed and returned a commitment card. A mailing can also be developed for those individuals who did not return a commitment card. The pastor may ask again for the gift of their financial support and include information about the program's success. All commitment cards should be recorded and filed for follow-up later in the year.

**DIOCESE OF JOLIET**  
**PLANNED PARISH OFFERING LOGISTICS**  
**MAILING COMPANY REQUIREMENTS**

Please submit *five weeks in advance* of program start date:

1. Your letters separated into the segmentations (both Week 1 and Week 2)
2. The data in Asce II, Excel or comma delimited format separated into segmentations with the appropriate extractions. The extracted data should include Mailing Name (i.e. Mr. and Mrs. John Smith), Mailing Address, City, State, Zip and Salutation (i.e. John and Patty). *Please note: some parishioners may fall in a few of the extracted categories; be certain that parishioners are not receiving two letters each week. Decide which extraction takes precedence. For example, some parishes extract school parents and major donors and families could fall under both categories. Decide which is primary and extract accordingly.*
3. E-mail print ready pdfs of your letterhead and #10 envelope along with a scanned copy of the Pastor's signature
4. Your letters should initially be sent to Tony Brandolino in the Development and Stewardship Office ([tbrandolino@dioceseofjoliet.org](mailto:tbrandolino@dioceseofjoliet.org) or fax: 815-838-8108) *six weeks in advance of your program*, they will be reviewed and sent back to you, and then the final letter(s) should be sent to the mailing company.

Your data, and letters can be sent electronically to William Minarich at [art.minarich@ameritech.net](mailto:art.minarich@ameritech.net). If you need any other information or have any questions, please contact:

William Minarich, Minarich Graphics  
1920 Donmaur Drive  
Crest Hill, IL 60403  
(815) 725-3500 (voice)  
(815) 725-3585 (fax)

Please contact Jim Tidaback in the Department of Development and Stewardship at (815) 834-4049 or [jtidaback@dioceseofjoliet.org](mailto:jtidaback@dioceseofjoliet.org) with questions.

**DIOCESE OF JOLIET**  
**PLANNED PARISH OFFERING PROGRAM**

**WEEK I**

**Introduction of the planned offering program.** The homily emphasizes the themes of stewardship: gratitude, sharing and accountability. This is an opportunity to call parishioners to a greater awareness of the need for participation in all areas of parish life. In addition to encouraging the sharing of one's time and talent through the various ministries (possibly recognize those at Mass who volunteer with the different commissions and ministries), the financial state of the parish should also be communicated. This can be a "State of the Parish" address and Stewardship Reporting with a summary included in the bulletin or mailed with the first parishioner letter the following Monday.

**(Please see Appendix III for suggested homily talking points).**

The parishioner letter should recap what was communicated in the homily—the overall stewardship theme and the importance of sharing of one's blessings. The parishioner database should be segmented, with a personalized letter sent to each parishioner.

**Suggested Bulletin Insert and/or Pulpit Announcement:**

As we begin our Planned Parish Offering Program we are asked to reflect on God's blessings in our lives and also to commit to share of these financial blessings as a way to express our love for God and for others. During this next week you will receive a letter inviting you to reflect on your blessings, of which I hope this parish, *your* parish is included. Please respond lovingly and generously, as you are able, giving from your first fruits in gratitude to God.

**Prayer:**

For a greater spirit of true, selfless generosity in the way of Christ, as individual stewards and as faith community, we pray....

**WEEK II**

Lay witnesses are encouraged to speak the second weekend of the program. Lay Witnesses should communicate their understanding of stewardship and the importance of sharing their time, talent and treasure in thanksgiving for the blessings shared with them. Witnesses may explain how the parish meets the various needs of its members through the plethora of ministries at the parish, and also explain that these ministries are supported through the offertory collection.

Those asked to speak should understand the Christian stewardship concepts of gratitude, sharing, accountability and making a return with increase to God. Speakers might be identifiable parish leaders, school families and/or a longtime member of the parish — parishioners who live their faith commitment and can motivate others to get involved in parish life.

A second letter is mailed to parishioners the following Monday. This letter reiterates the ideas expressed by lay witnesses and is also plea for support. A commitment card is also included. These will also be made available in the church pews.

**Bulletin Insert and/or Pulpit Announcement:**

A second letter will be mailed to you this week inviting you to consider your financial giving to our parish. Your donations help us to serve you and others in our community. As your pastor, I hope that you will be open to this letter, pray about what God is asking of you, and respond accordingly.

*Or*

Our Planned Parish Offering Program is one very important way to express our self-giving for the good of others and for God's greater glory. This Program will conclude next weekend with Commitment Sunday. This week, each registered household will receive a summary letter and Declaration of Intention Card in next Sunday's offertory collection. Please pray about this and return your Intention Card in next Sunday's offertory collection. Your donation aids the parish in forecasting revenue for the next year. Please reflect on your spending priorities, consider where our parish is currently placed within them, and consider making a planned, proportionate and sacrificial gift to our offertory program.

**Prayer:**

For a greater readiness to respond generously in faith and in love as the people of PARISH NAME faith community, we pray...

**COMMITMENT SUNDAY**

The celebrant recaps the stewardship themes expressed in the previous two weekends and thanks those who have returned their commitment cards —an outward sign of their support of the parish. Time is made after the homily for persons to complete a commitment card if they have not already done so and return it in the offertory collection. Cards and pencils should be made available in the pews.

**(Please see Appendix III for suggested homily talking points).**

**Bulletin Insert and/ or Pulpit Announcement:**

Giving to our Planned Parish Offering Program is one way to give back to God, to say thank you for all with which we have been blessed. To all of those who have responded, thank you.

**Prayer: (Select one)**

For a greater willingness to be faithful stewards, giving in proportion to how we have been blessed by God, we pray....

That the gifts we are about to give to the offertory collection truly reflect a meaningful expression of our gratitude to God for God's blessings in our lives, we pray....

That the contributions that we are about to share with our family of faith demonstrate an appropriate measure of appreciation for all the goodness in our lives, we pray...

That like the gifts that we bring to the altar, may those we collect in our offertory baskets represent the finest expression of sacrifice we can give, we pray...

May God look favorably upon our use of all the gifts God has given us as we share them with our worship community, we pray...

And as our offertory is taken up, may the contributions included in this week's collection reflect our desire to truly share thoughtful and proportionate gifts in response to the many blessings God has so generously and consistently bestowed on us, we pray....

**OFFERTORY OF THE MASS**

The message of stewardship as a life of discipleship is central to the Eucharist and is engrained in scripture. According to early Church documents, the offertory collection is an important part of the Mass and therefore collections must not be disguised or hurried along. Studies show the passing of the basket from one person to the next, with each person actually touching it, is the most effective invitation to respond with a gift.

The Collection basket holds the gifts of the congregation, the fruits of their work; completely connecting each individual's lives, prayers, faith, love, sacrifice and worship. The offerings should be treated as our collective sacrificial offerings in union with Jesus' ultimate sacrifice. Our offering of the first fruits of bread and wine and treasure is presented. The priest should receive them with gratitude, bless them with reverence and present them to God with respect.

**Offertory Suggestions:**

Place a large basket wrapped in a bow at the front of the altar. Invite youth to leave their pews and place their offering in the basket. Pass the basket throughout the congregation and combine this with the offering on the altar.

Invite all individuals to the altar to place their offering.

Ask parishioners to place an (anonymous) sealed note of "What I've Done for God" this week in the offertory-a symbol of the importance of sharing all of ourselves. If fitting, publish some in the bulletin.

### PROGRAM FOLLOW-UP

The parish should mail a thank you letter to those who have made a stewardship commitment. Ideally, this letter should be mailed within one week of receiving the commitment and should state the nature of the commitment. The reasons for this are twofold: to express appreciation and also to subtly encourage follow-through on the commitment. Commitments should be immediately entered in your database and should also be kept on file. (*Please see Appendix V for a sample letter*).

#### Prayer:

For a greater commitment by each of us as part of the parish community of PARISH NAME to care for the poor and for those in need, we pray....

### FOLLOW-UP ALTAR OR BULLETIN ANNOUNCEMENTS:

#### Bulletin and/or Altar Announcement:

Our Planned Parish Offering Program enables us to continue our ministries at PARISH NAME and outreach to those within our local and greater Church. Thank you to those who have responded. If you have not yet been able to respond, I invite you to do so. Extra Intention Cards are available at the back of the Church. Cards may be returned to the rectory or to an usher after Mass.

#### If letter being mailed home:

Follow-up letters to those who have not yet responded to the Offertory Program will be mailed this week. If you have not yet made your commitment, please complete the card that will be enclosed and return it promptly.

As commitment cards are returned, a thank you letter should immediately be sent to those making an offertory commitment. This letter should include the amount the parishioner has committed to give over the course of the next year, and whether their offering will be paid weekly or monthly.

Approximately one month after the offertory program ends, a letter can also be mailed to those who have not made a commitment. This letter can highlight the importance of Christian stewardship and monetary investment in the parish. You can include information about the program's success, the tangible results for the parish, and the

importance of the intangible/non-quantifiable results for those who give of themselves prayerfully and sacrificially. *(Please see Appendix VII for a sample letter).*

## REPORTING

*A Sample Weekly Stewardship Bulletin Insert:*

### **Rooted in Faith- Grounded in Love-Alive With the Spirit Stewardship-The Way to Live**

#### ***This week's Stewardship Salute:***

In gratitude for God's gifts of time and talent to us, we gratefully acknowledge and salute:

Maria Gonzalez

Who brings the Eucharist and our community's prayers to the homebound and hospitalized? Thank you Maria!

#### ***Parish Sacrificial Giving Summary***

Regular Sunday Offertory

Year to Date Information 1/1/04-present:

Goal:

Amount Collected:

Amount short/ahead of goal:

Weekly Information:

Last week's Sunday Offertory:

Amount Budgeted:

## QUARTERLY REPORTING

Many successful stewardship parishes provide their parishioners with personalized quarterly stewardship reports. The Quarterly Report gives a statement of financial gifts and reminds parishioners of parish involvement.

Every registered parish household should receive the Quarterly Report, although it is not advisable to send it to newly registered families, those temporarily away, or those who asked not to receive the report. (*Please see Appendix I for sample Report*)

*Quarterly reports are beneficial in many ways:*

Increase Average Donation- It has been proven in thousands of parishes throughout the country that parishes providing quarterly stewardship reports to parish families experience a significant increase in their offertory collection.

Absenteeism- Research shows that more than one-half of registered parishioners are absent from Mass most weekends. This means that parishes that only provide a communication system of receiving and tracking gifts from the people who are in attendance at Mass are under-utilizing potential resources. Offering a credit card option of giving may be one way to help parishioners give consistently; a Quarterly Report may also help gradually bring parishioners to a practice of giving consistently.

Track Offertory Gifts- People want to fulfill their stewardship intention but sometimes lose track of their progress. Parishioners will generally "get back on track" if a parish initiates the conversation. Many parishioners think no one has noticed, or cares, that they have fallen behind. Some may conclude that an offertory gift makes little difference. A gentle reminder may encourage parishioners who have fallen behind to resume their offertory giving.

Convey Appreciation- The Quarterly Report also offers the parish a chance to affirm and show appreciation for their parishioners' generosity.

Provide Financial Update- Parishioners oftentimes are unaware of the parish's financial status. When appropriate, a parish status report could accompany the personal stewardship Quarterly Report.

Share Ministry Success- Inform parishioners about how the parish ministries are fulfilling the work of the Church through the generosity of time and talent.

Accountability- People benefit and respond to instruments of accountability. This Quarterly Report is a tool that helps parishioners respond to the stewardship message of using our gifts in a responsible way.

*Sample Announcements week before quarterly reminders are to be mailed:*

**Bulletin Announcement:**

This week, we will mail quarterly Offertory reminders to all parishioners who have made a commitment to the Parish Offering Program. These are reminders, not bills. There will be no "amount due" indicated anywhere on the reminder.

Many of our parishioners are away from the parish on a number of weekends each year. This can result in a substantial deficit in our Offertory collections. For example, if 100 families, who each give \$15, are away on a given weekend, that is a \$1500 loss. That alone would be a problem; when it happens over many weekends, it becomes a serious concern. For this reason, parish leadership felt that it was important to keep parishioners aware of how they are doing on their commitments.

If you have a shortfall, any effort to make up some or all of this will be greatly appreciated. On the other hand, if you find the commitment that you made is too large, please call \_\_\_\_\_ in the parish office at \_\_\_\_\_ and reduce your commitment.

**Pulpit Announcement**

This week we will be mailing quarterly reminders to those who participated in our Offertory Program. These are only reminders- not bills. More information is available in the bulletin.

*(Please see Appendix VII for sample Quarterly Reminder)*

## SAMPLE PARISH STEWARDSHIP REPORT

### Our Parish Population:

1035 households, 3045 individuals

76 new registrants in the past year

### Sacramental Preparation Programs:

48 parents prepared by 8 Baptism Team Members

7 catechumens and 12 candidates prepared by 10 team members in RCIA

132 confirmation candidates by 10 catechists and 11 facilitators, administered by 9 confirmation core team members

78 second graders prepared for First Reconciliation and Holy Eucharist by 16 people

22 couples prepared for marriage in a Pre-Cana Day by couples

### Sacraments Celebrated

525 Masses

44 Funerals

72 Baptisms

132 Confirmations

78 First Eucharists

1 Vocation to the Priesthood/ Religious Life

78 First Reconciliations

23 Marriages

125 Anointings of the Sick

### Education and Faith Formation Programs

1100 students (Pre-K -8) taught by 22 teachers and 20 aides

268 religious education students (Grades 1-8) taught weekly by 11 religious ed teachers

65 students (Grades K-4) met weekly for Children's Liturgy of the Word led by 8 catechists

83 Vacation Bible School students taught for a week

6 Prayer Groups with 48 participants met and prayed monthly

### Liturgy Assistance

21 Lectors

36 Altar Servers

28 Ushers

48 Choir Members

12 Cantors

32 Eucharistic Ministers

Parish Outreach

76 home visits to new parishioners

41 home visits to the homebound and nursing homes

2,640 service hours performed by 132 confirmation candidates

30 boys and 20 girls were led by 20 leaders in scouting programs

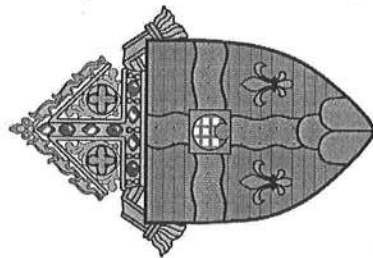
650 students participated in school sports, 21 coaches

Administrative Programs

Pastoral Council met monthly with 9 parishioners and 2 staff members

Finance Council met monthly with 8 parishioners

Adapted from *Today's Parish* (January 1995) pp. 34-35.



*Everything we have is a gift from God.  
Sharing of ourselves and our financial resources is a loving and just act,  
a way to give back in gratitude, a way to say*

# “THANK YOU GOD”

**Please Print**

Prayerfully considering how I/we will faithfully and generously share my/our monetary blessings with our parish community, I/we commit to sharing my/our financial resources by making a

- weekly
- monthly offering of \$ \_\_\_\_\_

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

Email \_\_\_\_\_ Phone # \_\_\_\_\_

Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

*This is a declaration of intention and is not legally binding. Parish contributions are tax deductible.*

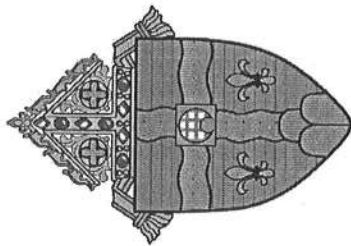
## DECLARATION OF INTENTION

### *Suggestions for a Sacrificial Offertory Gift*

*Please consider the following method for determining your offertory gift.*

- Locate your household income.
- Identify your current weekly gift.
- See what percentage of your income that you are currently sharing.
- Consider increasing your gift.

GROSS HOUSEHOLD INCOME	WEEKLY GIVING TO THE OFFERTORY								
	Yearly	Hourly	1%	2%	3%	4%	5%	10%	
\$30,000	\$14	\$6	\$12	\$17	\$20	\$23	\$27	\$34	\$58
\$35,000	\$17	\$7	\$13	\$15	\$17	\$20	\$23	\$27	\$34
\$40,000	\$19	\$8	\$15	\$19	\$23	\$29	\$31	\$38	\$38
\$50,000	\$24	\$10	\$19	\$23	\$29	\$35	\$46	\$48	\$48
\$60,000	\$29	\$12	\$23	\$27	\$35	\$40	\$54	\$58	\$58
\$70,000	\$34	\$13	\$27	\$31	\$40	\$46	\$62	\$67	\$67
\$80,000	\$38	\$15	\$31	\$35	\$46	\$52	\$69	\$77	\$77
\$90,000	\$43	\$17	\$35	\$38	\$52	\$58	\$77	\$87	\$87
\$100,000	\$48	\$19	\$42	\$46	\$58	\$63	\$85	\$96	\$96
\$110,000	\$53	\$21	\$46	\$50	\$63	\$69	\$92	\$106	\$106
\$120,000	\$58	\$23	\$50	\$54	\$69	\$75	\$100	\$115	\$115
\$130,000	\$63	\$25	\$54	\$58	\$75	\$81	\$108	\$125	\$125
\$140,000	\$67	\$27	\$58	\$62	\$81	\$87	\$115	\$135	\$135
\$150,000	\$72	\$29	\$62	\$67	\$87	\$92	\$125	\$144	\$144



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a way to give back in gratitude, a way to say*

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Prayerfully considering how I/we will faithfully and generously share my/our monetary blessings with our parish community, I/we commit to sharing my/our financial resources by making a

- weekly
- monthly offering of \$ \_\_\_\_\_

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

Email \_\_\_\_\_ Phone # \_\_\_\_\_

Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

*This is a declaration of intention and is not legally binding. Parish contributions are tax deductible.*

## DECLARATION OF INTENTION

*Suggestions for a Sacrificial Offertory Gift*

*Please consider the following method for determining your offertory gift.*

- Locate your household income.
- Identify your current weekly gift.
- See what percentage of your income that you are currently sharing.
- Consider increasing your gift.

GROSS HOUSEHOLD INCOME		WEEKLY GIVING TO THE OFFERTORY					
Yearly	Hourly	1%	2%	3%	4%	5%	10%
\$15,000	\$7.20	\$3	\$6	\$9	\$12	\$14	\$28
\$20,000	\$9.60	\$4	\$8	\$12	\$15	\$19	\$38
\$25,000	\$12	\$5	\$10	\$15	\$20	\$25	\$50
\$30,000	\$14.50	\$6	\$12	\$17	\$23	\$29	\$58
\$35,000	\$16.75	\$7	\$13	\$20	\$27	\$34	\$68
\$40,000	\$19.25	\$8	\$15	\$23	\$31	\$38	\$76
\$50,000	\$24	\$10	\$19	\$29	\$38	\$48	\$96
\$60,000	\$29	\$12	\$23	\$35	\$46	\$58	\$116
\$70,000	\$33.50	\$13	\$27	\$40	\$54	\$67	\$134
\$80,000	\$38.50	\$15	\$31	\$46	\$62	\$77	\$154
\$90,000	\$43.50	\$17	\$35	\$52	\$69	\$87	\$174
\$100,000	\$48	\$19	\$38	\$58	\$77	\$96	\$192

THE LAY WITNESS TALK

1. Introduce yourself.  
Give a description of your family, the number of years in the parish, etc.
2. Properly define Christian stewardship.  
Stewardship is a response one makes in gratitude for what has been granted us. Stewardship is an intentional, planned, proportionate giving of our time, talent and treasure. Stewardship: 1) asks us that we help each other recognize the gifts and talents with which God has blessed us and the ways which we have been blessed by the gifts and talents of others 2) invites us to help discern, call forth and continually encourage one another to use the gifts and talents with which God has blessed us according to God's will and 3) challenges us to share our time, our talent and our treasure beyond what we believe we can do so we can grow, individually and collectively, as God desires.
3. Discuss how you began practicing stewardship.  
When did you first become aware of this way of living? What did you think when you first heard about it? What happened in your life to cause you to make changes in the sharing of your blessings?
4. Share the effects of living stewardship.  
How has practicing stewardship affected your life? Your faith life? The way you live in the world? Talk about your own growth as a giver, the challenges it presented, and the benefits and blessings that have resulted.
5. Invite parishioners into this way of living.  
Ask parishioners to reflect upon God's multiple gifts in their lives and invite them to share of their time, talent and treasure as a way of thanking God for their abundance.

Lay Witness Do's:

1. Do emphasize that everything in life is a gift from God.
2. Do ask people to reflect upon what is good in their lives and invite them to reflect on how they thank God for this goodness.
3. Do talk about giving a grateful share of time, talent and treasure. Stress that a grateful share is the first share, the "first fruits" not what is left over.
4. Do present stewardship as a total way of Christian life--a way we make choices, a way we live everyday in our lives.
5. Do talk about the importance of planning. Explain that financial stewardship means making a commitment to give a definite percentage on a regular basis, not

just once in awhile. Encourage people to know what percentage they currently give to God.

6. Do share your struggles with stewardship as well as your triumphs. People will appreciate your honesty and will be more open to your message if they can identify with you.
7. Do be well prepared.
8. Do have your talk reviewed by someone you trust before you give it.

Lay Witness Talk “Don’ts”:

1. Do not talk in “bargaining” terms (“I gave this and God gave me this in return.”)
2. Stress church needs or budgets. Stewardship is about our need to give back, not the parish’s need for “things.”
3. Talk in dollar or time amounts. “If everyone could give \$10 a week.” Or, “we need \$2 more a week from everyone.” Or “you need to give your fair share.” Let people decide for themselves what is a grateful and proportionate gift.
4. Don’t stress the 10% tithe as a strict and intimidating obligation. As most Catholics give 1.2% of their income to the Church, jumping to 10% may seem, and very well may be, unrealistic. Only the individual parishioner can decide what is a planned, proportionate and sacrificial gift for him or herself.
5. Don’t use threats of possible consequences stemming from the failure to give: “We won’t be able to heat or air condition the church.” Or, “we’ll have to close the school.”
6. Suggest that stewardship is mandatory or an obligation.

### **Lay Witness Talk Preparation Suggestions**

An important part of people’s acceptance of the concept of stewardship is the personal witness and individual testimony you provide with your presence and the way you present your stewardship journey. The following are suggestions in preparing your comments:

1. Pray. Spend time talking and listening to God. Reflect on the many blessings you have received. Think about where you are on your financial stewardship journey. Allow the Spirit to guide your words as you begin to prepare to share your journey.
2. Prepare your talk so you are comfortable with it. Use your own style, wording and delivery. Write out your talk using numbered or bulleted lists rather than long sentences so it is easier for you to make eye contact with your audience. Use a font size that is easy to see—at least 12 or 14 and consider double spacing.
3. It is best to rehearse your talk aloud. If you just practiced reading it silently, you won’t have the same effect. If it is possible, practice it in the church when no one is there using the sound system. Be comfortable enough with your material so that you can look up from your notes and make eye contact. In a large church, remember to turn to the sides occasionally to include everyone.
4. Be sincere, enthusiastic and friendly. It is more important to be comfortable and share your experience from the heart than to be eloquent.

### Presentation Day Suggestions:

1. Plan to arrive at least 15 minutes before the scheduled mass time.
2. Identify yourself to the celebrant before the liturgy begins. Be sure to confirm any logistics such as:
  - a). From where will you be speaking?
  - b). Where will you sit-near the altar, in a front pew, on the altar?
  - c). Will you process in with the celebrant and altar servers, etc.?
3. Speak slowly, loudly and clearly. It is important that your message is understood.
4. Be prepared and brief. Your talk should be no more than 8 minutes.
5. Dress appropriately.
6. Greet people after Mass at the back of church. This is an opportunity to talk informally with parishioners who may want to meet you.

### *A Different Twist on the Lay Witness Talk*

In some parishes where lay witnessing has been happening for years, there may be some feeling of repetitiveness. If so, be creative, but be certain the message is heard. Here are some suggestions:

#### Couple Witnessing

Have a husband and wife share the speaking. They can discuss how together, as a family, they have come to share of their resources more fully.

#### Group Witnessing

Have a variety of parishioners come forward to present a quick thought or witness on giving. These parishioners would be assigned to give personal or scriptural reflection and would invite the congregation into this way of living. One person, serving as the coordinator of the group, would explain what you are going to do and would end the presentation with a broader invitation.

#### Dramatization

A mini-play could catch attention. Some suggestions are:

- One parishioner explaining to a new or skeptical parishioner what stewardship means personally and for the parish.
  - A staged radio or television interview about stewardship.
  - Children (real or adults acting like children) explaining stewardship as if through the eyes of kids commenting on their parents' stewardship.
  - A saint-possibly the parish patron saint—returned to earth to try to understand our modern day needs and wants vs. stewardship.

## *Sample Lay Witness Talk:*

### Introduction:

*Good morning. My name is Steve Smith and I am here to talk to you for just a few minutes about stewardship.*

*Stewardship, as you know, is giving some of your time, talent and treasure back to God in appreciation for all that God has given to you. I want to share with you my personal experience in trying to be a steward in this parish.*

### Personalization:

*I am thankful to both God and to our parish for allowing me the opportunity to participate as an active member in this great parish of ours. I have worked with many of you with our children's sport programs and our parish picnics. When I first came to this parish I wasn't aware of how I would participate in this great community that many of you and those who came before us has built. At our first parents' meeting I took a daring step and raised my hand and said, "Sure, I'll get involved. What do you want me to do?"*

*Boy, did my life change! I began associating names with those faces I would see at Mass each week. Parish was no longer a bunch of strangers, but a group of friends, family. After organization meetings I would find myself energized and eager to attend the next meeting. I can't begin to tell you the joy and happiness I have received as member actively contributing and working in this parish. My involvement provided me with a sense of belonging. Accomplishments were being made and I was participating.*

### Scripture

*I also discovered that it was true what Jesus told us in Matthew 6:21- "For where your treasure is, there also will your heart be." In keeping with God's command to us to give back our first fruits, my wife and I have made a commitment to give a percentage of our income every month to the Church before we do anything else. This isn't always easy, but it is always very gratifying to know that we are doing the right thing and we are helping our parish to stay strong. And I can tell you that somehow God has provided for us and our heart truly is in our parish and that is a joyful thing.*

### Detail

*I don't tell you all of this to brag about what I have done, but rather to encourage you, too, to know the joy and happiness that my family and I have found by giving of ourselves and our resources to our parish. This weekend after all of our Masses we are having our Ministry Fair. I encourage you to stop by and take a few minutes to see all that is happening in our parish. Pick up a copy of our Time and Talent catalog. Can you give the parish some of your time? Do you have a special talent you could share? The catalog lists all parish organizations- I bet you will find an organization that will be a good fit in which to share your time and talent. Does your financial support of this parish truly reflect all of the blessings God has given to you? I promise that you will see that your gifts of treasure to this parish help us to do God's work.*

*Later this week/month you will receive a letter from PASTOR NAME, and an intention card in the mail (hold up Declaration of Intention). I encourage you to pray about your gift of treasure to the parish. Does your financial support of our parish reflect the myriads of ways in which you have been blessed? This intention card is very important because it will help us plan for our future needs and activities.*

*Invitation:*

*I encourage you- from my own personal experience- don't be afraid to get involved. Good things happen when you share of yourself; you will know the deep joy that comes from being a part of God's work here on earth.*

*In closing, I leave you with this thought on gratitude by Thomas Merton.*

*"To be grateful is to recognize the Love of God in everything he has given us—and He has given us everything. Every breath we draw is a gift of His love, every moment of existence is a grace, for it brings with it immense graces from Him. Gratitude therefore takes nothing for granted, is never unresponsive, is constantly awakening to new wonder and to praise of the goodness of God. For the grateful person knows that God is good, not by hearsay but by experience. And that is what makes all the difference."*

## *Sample Couple Lay Witness*

NANCY AND MICHAEL BROWN, ST. JOSEPH PARISH

Father has asked us to respond to three questions: How are you involved? Why is stewardship important to you? How has it changed your lives?

Nancy: Good morning...I'd like to begin by saying that right now we'd rather be sitting out there next to you listening to a witness talk instead of up here giving one. When we were asked to do this, we initially said "let us think about this for a minute...ah...NOOOO." But as we continued to think about it, we decided that it's important for all of us to share our faith journey with each other so here we are.

The first question is how are we involved? Michael and I are thankful for the opportunity to be involved in a number of things. Together, we're active in the Family Ministry as marriage preparation facilitators for Focus and Precana. We're site managers at the PADS shelter and we work with the 7th graders at St. Joes and other area schools to help them understand more about what it feels like to be homeless. And recently we've been working with Catholic Relief Services on a shelter for street children in Cuzco, Peru.

We also try to make a difference individually: Michael is very active with Catholic Charities and he serves on the Finance Committee and the Stewardship Committee at St. Joes. I'm a Court Appointed Special Advocate for abused and neglected children and I'm also a food coordinator for the PADS site.

Michael: **So that's how we are involved. The 2<sup>nd</sup> question that Father asked us to address is WHY we are involved?"** and for us there are 3 reasons.

**Our first reason** is gratitude and we have along list of blessings to count: We are grateful for our family, we are thankful to be part of our parish and it's important to say that we are grateful and proud to be Catholic.

**Our second reason** is that it just feels good and there doesn't seem to be any downside. Our volunteer work feels purposeful and it's a constant source of learning, peace and inspiration.

**Our third reason** comes from an awakening and a difficult question that we ask ourselves which is: "Just what did Jesus mean when he said that loving our neighbor is not only important, but it's one of the two great commandments?" Somehow, it seems like this is more than just a suggestion. So part of our ongoing struggle is to really understand how we can be effective disciples. This is hard because we are blessed with abundance and we are surrounded by neighbors in need. From our work with Catholic Charities we know that 1 in every 6 children in Illinois goes to bed hungry. There is no simple answer but in our hearts we know that we need to do our best to make a difference.

At this point we'd like to back up and share a little about the experiences that have shaped our thinking and how we got involved and we'll start with treasure. The reality is that when talk about Stewardship we think that it's about money. What's become clear to the two of us is that the treasure only one piece in a 3 part puzzle. The other parts are equally essential elements which we will get to in a moment.

Here is our thinking about Stewardship of Treasure. 20 years ago we lived in Minneapolis and we heard a witness talk from a couple who were members of our parish. At a Sunday Mass they said that they had made a decision to give a fixed % of their income to our church and other charities and they felt that it simplified their lives and provided them with a sense of freedom. It was the start of our **plan for giving**. After we heard them speak, we asked ourselves 'what % of our income did we give to our parish and other charities?' We then sorted out what felt right. We stared out small with an aspiration that eventually it would be 10%.

We feel that no one can tell us what's right for us to give because we all have different life circumstances. The couple in Minneapolis didn't try to give us the answers they just gave us the right questions and it was up to us to reconcile:

- What matters most to us? (what do we value/)
- What are our gifts?
- How will we share them?

We now do this every year. The process has worked because it produces clarity

Nancy: In some ways the treasure question was simpler for us to solve than the time and talent questions. I'd like to share a bit of my personal stewardship journey with you. This is the "Reader's Digest" condensed version of the last 30 years. Early in our marriage we moved to Madison, Wisconsin. Soon after we registered at the local church, I received a call from the Religious Ed Director asking if I would teach a 2<sup>nd</sup> grade class. I immediately said...ah...no. Do you see a pattern here? The "NO" jumps out of my mouth so quickly when I'm asked to come out of my comfort zone. But this Religious Ed Director convinced me that I could do this. She caught me at a very vulnerable moment. I was new to the area, pregnant with our first child, constantly fighting morning sickness and I had no friends. So I was ripe for the picking and she grabbed me. I didn't realize it at the time but God was coming after me trying to get me to notice Him.

Teaching this class opened a whole new world to me. I was raised in a non-practicing Catholic family. We were the Christmas and Easter people so I was learning basic Catholic concepts while I was teaching. Listening to those 7 and 8 year old children speak lovingly of Jesus and God's love for them was a big awakening for me. As I would tell the children how special they were, how much Jesus loved them, how God loved them before they were even born I began to recognize that I was blessed with the incredible dignity of being called a child of God. The light bulbs started going off in my head and I began to put this puzzle together.

The second part of my story deals with Service. I love the song "The Summons." Our choir sings this frequently and it really speaks to me. One verse calls us to use the faith we've found to reshape the world around. Use the faith we've found to reshape the world around? Sometimes it takes a bit of reflection to figure out how to do that! So, I have gifts. I know that...someone's been telling me this all my life; my parents, teachers, employers...But at some point I had to ask myself, "How do I discover what my gifts are? How am I supposed to serve in the body of Christ?" If I spend too much time trying to analyze this I might become paralyzed with fear. There's a big world out there with plenty of needs, so where do I fit in? The reality is that most people involved in a ministry start out volunteering in a small way. We usually don't just jump in with both feet. And I didn't either.

I started working with the homeless 25 years ago. Our parish provided dinner one night a month for a soup kitchen in Minneapolis and asked for volunteers to cook a turkey. I signed up, feeling I could do that. It was just one turkey...I could handle a turkey.

So what was my gift? Cooking a turkey is a very practical thing and although it benefited people materially, it certainly didn't seem very spiritual. But what made this service "*spiritual*" was that it was inspired and directed by the Holy Spirit. He summoned and I followed. I have to admit that I didn't understand this right away and it took me a while to recognize my gift of service to the homeless but I never would have experienced it if I hadn't plunged in and cooked that first turkey.

Michael: My story is I have spent a good portion of my adult life as a complacent Catholic. My real start followed Nancy's lead. I was inspired by her commitment to Christian Service. I have also found that offering my time and talent has helped me learn some things that I have needed to know.

There are many examples but one stands out. We were working in the PADs shelter on a Saturday night and I saw a man who seemed to be studying. I sat down beside him and asked if I could help. He said his name

was Robert and that he had just had a good job interview and there was a job for him if he could pass a test. He had some sample questions to help him prepare but he said that he didn't understand graphs and he said I can't do this.

I spent the next hour helping but mostly listening to his story. He said that his life was filled with bad luck but mostly bad choices and there were things in his past that were unforgivable. I shared with him our belief that we can't fix from today back, we can only look forward and that's what a loving and forgiving God wants us to do. We finished our discussion of graphs and then Nancy and I went home.

The following week I got a letter from Robert. He thanked me for the **TIME**. And it struck me that it was just a little time but **doing a little thing can make a big difference**. It also struck me that I thought that I was helping Robert but he was actually helping me understand that part of my journey is just to be present, to listen and possibly provide a little hope.... In the letter he also said that he got the job.

Nancy: So our bottom line is this... Stewardship is important to us for the following reasons:

- Because we are grateful for our blessings and it seems like the more we do the happier we become.
- Because we believe that we are called to love our neighbor, whether it's the person next to us in the pew or a child in Tanzania.
- Because we believe that we are all, everyone sitting here today, we are all the hands and feet of Jesus.

And because we believe that we just have to do our best and trust in God to do the rest.

Michael: Our conclusion is that Stewardship has in many ways changed our lives. We both believe that we receive more than we give. Our stewardship of treasure is an important acknowledgement of God's gifts to us **and at the same time Nancy and I need to be involved in ministries that will bring us peace and learning and purpose.**

So, we will close with gratitude: We are thankful for our wonderful priests who continue to encourage us to think about our spiritual growth and the many opportunities our parish offers to challenge us to come out of our comfort zone. We are grateful for St. Joe's involvement in CRHP and the renewal it has brought to our faith journey and we are grateful for your kindness and compassion.

Thank you and God Bless You!

HOMILY TALKING POINTS

Week I

Good morning/afternoon/evening.

One of my responsibilities as pastor of PARISH NAME is to be a good steward of our parish, to responsibly administrate all that needs tending to (with the help of dedicated staff and volunteers of course), while also aiding in the ministerial needs of the parish—and that, honestly, is what I am most comfortable with. However, by virtue of my position and because of the reality of salaries that need to be paid, lights that need to be on and doors that need to be open to you and to anyone in our neighborhood that longs to find solace, or maybe just a bite to eat, I must share with you our financial situation and invite you to support our Planned Offering Program.

- 1). Share a stewardship report (See Appendix I)
- 2). Share fiscal report and mention either that this is 1) included in the bulletin or 2) will be mailed home.

Our financial resources, combined with the talents and energies of numerous volunteers, allow PARISH NAME to be a vibrant faith community where I hope you feel nurtured and spiritually supported during your life's journey. But most things that happen here do require money. I hope you will listen closely the next few weeks as some of your parishioners share their story of why PARISH NAME is an integral part of their lives. I hope, too, that you will prayerfully reflect upon the letters you will receive offering an overview of our financial situation, our successes, and my invitation to you to commit to financially supporting your parish in a planned, proportionate and sacrificial way. Please consider how God has blessed you. Also consider how your parish has blessed you. And please pray the next few weeks for the success of our planned offering program.

**Week III - Commitment Sunday**

Today we celebrate Commitment Sunday, the culmination of our Planned Offering Program. Though this is the end of the formalities of this program—until next year---this is truly just the beginning. You have heard from your peers and me about the financial needs of PARISH NAME. NAMES OF LAY WITNESSES have also shared what our faith community means to them. I hope that you have had a chance to reflect these last few weeks on what your faith means to you, what your parish means to you, and how God has blessed you. If we really think about it, we each are amazingly blessed....we just need to take the time in prayer and reflection to think about these blessings and thank the Giver of these blessings.

One way to show our gratitude to God is to share some of our gifts. Ideally, we invest in what we believe in. We volunteer. We financially support. I hope that you believe in PARISH NAME and believe in what our parish does for you and for our community. I hope you find that this is a place you want to invest in.

You each received a Declaration of Intention in the mail this past week. If, by chance, you forgot your card, please take one from the pew, fill it out, place it in today's offertory collection or return it to the rectory at your earliest convenience. You may have noticed on the card a giving guide noting your annual salary or hourly wage and what is a 1%-10% gift of that amount. Most Catholics give 1.2% of their income to their Church. I wonder where God rates in relation to the entire myriad of ways we spend our money.

Today I drop my Declaration of Intention in the Offertory Collection. I hope you will do the same. Please be assured that all of the money that you donate to our parish will be used for the parish.

Thank you for your presence in our faith community and thank you for all you do to bring Christ to others through your own life and the ways in which you share of yourself and your resources—however you are able.

Thank You God.

Appendix VI

**THANK YOU LETTER**

**(THIS LETTER SHOULD BE MAILED WITHIN TWO WEEKS OF COMMITMENT SUNDAY).**

Parishioner Name  
Mailing Address  
City, State Zip

Dear Salutation:

Thank you for returning your Declaration of Intention Card for our parish's offertory collection. Your participation in our parish's financial stewardship effort gives witness to your faith and your commitment to our PARISH NAME faith community.

You noted on your Declaration of Intention a weekly/monthly commitment of \$\_\_\_\_\_. Thank you. I assure you that I, and the parish lay leaders will do our utmost to use your offerings wisely for the ultimate benefit of building God's kingdom.

We are a gifted parish community filled with many parishioners willing to share of themselves and their blessings. Your sharing of a portion of that which God has blessed you is appreciated. May you continue to be blessed abundantly.

Sincerely,

Pastor Name

Appendix VII

**FOLLOW-UP LETTER**

Date

Parishioner(s) Name

Address

City, State Zip

Dear Salutation:

Over the last few weeks PARISH NAME has conducted a Planned Parish Offering Program. This program's purpose is to increase offertory donations by parishioners while encouraging individual reflection on the abundance of blessings giving by our generous God. To date, \_\_\_\_\_ parishioners have returned their Declaration of Intention.

Our records indicate that we have not yet received your Intention card. In an effort to receive a response from each parishioner, I have enclosed another card.

My seminary training did not educate me about the administrative responsibilities of running a parish and the need for monetary solicitations. As much as I dislike this aspect of my duties as pastor, it is a reality. However, when I think about the abundance of God-given blessings in my life, sharing a portion of my financial resources (made possible to be earned by the talents granted me by God) is a natural response. I hope you will find this is the case for you as well.

Thank you in advance for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Pastor

Appendix VIII

**QUARTERLY REMINDER**

*(This letter should be sent 13 weeks after Commitment Sunday and should be sent each quarter until the next Planned Offering Program).*

Dear Parishioner:

Thank you for your commitment to PARISH NAME Planned Offering Program. Your financial support will enable our parish in continuing its ministries while aiding in future planning. This letter serves as a quarterly reminder of your commitment.

For the past 13 weeks,

Your new parish offertory commitment, based upon your Declaration of Intention totaled:  
\$ \_\_\_\_\_.

Your actual parish offertory contributions totaled: \$ \_\_\_\_\_.

If you have any questions about this report, please feel free to call \_\_\_\_\_ at the parish office ( ) \_\_\_\_\_.

Thank you for sharing of your blessings.

Sincerely,

Pastor Name

**Please include some things that have happened in this first quarter since your Offering Program that were made possible through parish offertory donations.**

**DIOCESE OF JOLIET**  
**PLANNED PARISH OFFERTORY PROGRAM EVALUATION**

1). The program was clearly explained and any clarification that was needed was answered in a timely fashion. Yes or No.

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2). The mailing company was efficient and easy to work with. Yes or No.

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3). The letters, homily talking points, prayers, and bulletin inserts were clear and effective. Yes or No.

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4). I would/would not use the services of the Department of Development and Stewardship for my next Planned Offering Program. Please explain.

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5). I offer the following recommendations to improve the Program and/or the services offered by the Department of Development and Stewardship:

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6). Other:

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*(Optional)*

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Parish \_\_\_\_\_

**PLANNED OFFERING RENEWAL EVALUATION**

In order to properly evaluate the success of your parish's Planned Parish Offering Program, the Department of Stewardship and Development would like a comparison of collections five weeks before and five weeks after the Program.

WEEK	CASH	CHECK/ DEBIT	ENVELOPE	TOTAL	INTENTION CARDS
5					
4					
3					
2					
1					
Commitment Sunday					
1					
2					
3					
4					
5					

Average # donors 5 weeks prior to Commitment Sunday: \_\_\_\_\_

Average donated amount: \_\_\_\_\_

Average # donors 5 weeks after Commitment Sunday: \_\_\_\_\_

Average donated amount: \_\_\_\_\_

Percentage of Collection Increase: \_\_\_\_\_

If there are any factors that would have significantly positively or negatively affected your collections, please explain:

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Parish Name \_\_\_\_\_

Pastor \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Business Manager \_\_\_\_\_

*Please return this form to Jim Tidaback  
Department of Development and Stewardship  
St. Charles Pastoral Center  
101 W. Airport Rd.  
Romeoville, IL 60446  
Fax: 815-838-8108  
Phone 815-834-4049*





## **BENEFITS OF THE PLANNED PARISH OFFERING PROGRAM**

*(An appeal for increased offerings through the Sunday Offertory Collection)*

The Planned Parish Offering Program is conducted over a three-week period and includes a homily presentation by the pastor and lay witness presentations by individual parishioners. Following these homily presentations, a personalized, segmented mailing is sent to all parish households. This program can be adapted each year for use as a part of a parish's *annual stewardship appeal*; that time when we make a return to God with increase (to the parish) of a proportionate share of our treasure (financial resources). The following is a comprehensive description of the program:

### **WEEKEND #1 PASTOR INTRODUCTION**

The program is introduced on the first weekend with a homily presentation by the pastor at all Masses. The pastor's presentation is general and emphasizes themes of stewardship such as gratitude, sharing and accountability. This is an opportunity for the pastor to call parishioners to a greater awareness of the need for their participation in all areas of parish life, including the financial support of the parish. The homily becomes specific when the pastor explains the financial state of the parish. In this context, the relationship between the weekly Offertory collection and the operating budget of the parish is detailed.

The following week all registered parishioners receive a personalized letter from the pastor, restating the themes of his homily, with a special request for new, renewed and / or increased financial support (the gift of one's treasure) through the Sunday offertory collection. The mailing can be segmented if you wish into various parishioner groups (regular and non-regular contributors, school families and parents of children enrolled in religious education classes, for example). The segmented letters have a specific request for participation and support depending on the targeted audience and may indicate a parishioner's record of giving through the offertory collection for a certain period of time.

### **WEEKEND #2 LAY WITNESS TALKS**

On the second weekend parishioners give a witness talk about their involvement in the parish and how they have come to a greater understanding of stewardship and the importance of giving back to God through the gift of their time, talent and treasure. Speakers might be identifiable parish leaders, school families and / or long-time member of the parish – a parishioner who lives his / her faith commitment and can motivate others to become involved in parish life. Lay witnesses understand the concepts of gratitude, sharing, accountability and making a return with increase to God.  
*(Stewardship: An Overview).*