

Living Life As God Intended

Revised October 4th, 2018

Msgr. Thomas McGread

Msgr. Thomas McGread brought the stewardship way of life to St. Francis of Assisi in 1968. This way of life is captured in the words of St. Peter, "As each one has received a gift use it to serve one another as stewards of God's various grace." It was that vision that converted hearts changed lives and brought people closer to God and each other. He carried this message throughout the diocese of Wichita and throughout the United States. Living the stewardship way of life is the path in which one grows in faith and in God's love. It truly is a way of life. Therefore, stewardship in our parish did not stop when Msgr. McGread retired as pastor in 1999. Stewardship is on-going as parishioners introduce new members to this way of life.

Dedication

In gratitude to Msgr. McGread and to God for sending him to us we wish to dedicate this book to him, with our heart-felt thank you.

The Path to Stewardship

Our faith is about relationships. Through Christ we learn of the relationship between God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. He speaks of our relationship with the Father and with one another. At the heart of any relationship lies give and take. No believer can deny that God has given. He continues to give in the daily celebration of the Eucharist, in the public life of the parish, and in the personal lives of everyone who walks through the doors of your church.

Few of us have any problem in taking what God has given; but our faith concerns itself with exchange - give and take - mutual self-giving. Our faith demands that we give back to God some of what he has generously bestowed upon us and our families. We do so, as our Lord tells us in the Gospel of St. Matthew, by serving "the least of my brothers and sisters."

Repayment is obviously out of the question. We can never repay our Lord for all he has done. As the Psalm asks, "How can I repay the Lord for all the good he has done for me?" And he answers, "The cup of salvation I will raise" (Psalm 116:12-13). In other words, the Eucharist, which means "thanksgiving" in Greek, wherein we raise the cup of salvation, is the only way we can repay the Lord. Apart from Jesus, it is impossible for us to repay the Lord on our own. However, we should attempt to spend our whole life of discipleship trying. In the attempt comes the fulfillment of our Lord's command to stewardship. As disciples we are, by that fact, stewards.

The Bishop's pastoral letter released in May 1993 gives the following definition of stewardship and discipleship:

“Stewardship is an expression of discipleship with the power to change how we understand and live our lives.”

A Christian Disciple is, “one who responds to Christ’s call, follows Jesus, and shapes his or her life in imitation of his life.

In response to this discipleship, a Christian steward is “one who receives God’s gifts gratefully, and 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.”

For 50 Years We’ve Watched Stewardship Work

The above quotes from the Bishop’s pastoral letter on Stewardship were taught and put into practice at St. Francis of Assisi years before the letter. The following discussion of stewardship and our abiding conviction of its spiritual and temporal benefit has grown out of our 50 years of experience.

In 1968 our parish was nine years old. With three pastors in three years and several thousand dollars in debt, St. Francis was rapidly achieving a reputation as a “priest’s graveyard.” Discord split the parish, which was more a collection of factions than a true parish. St. Francis lacked any semblance of a community, much less a communion of souls.

Then came Fr. Thomas McGread.

Within hours of his arrival Father held a luncheon to announced the formation the *Vernacular*, a parish newsletter that would immediately begin to inform parishioners of events and activities at St. Francis. That newsletter is still going strong.

Organizational meetings took place, a parish dinner was served, a parish constitution was developed, a council elected, a mission written, and, in 1970, the parish fully embarked on the stewardship way of life. The concept of stewardship pervaded all activities. Father talked about stewardship in his homilies, and the *Vernacular* was full of information about its opportunities and rewards. A core of volunteers, following Fr. McGread’s example, reached out to other parishioners, new and old, made them feel important and invited them to share their time and talent.

By 1975 we were building a new church. In 1977 we added grades Kindergarten through Third to our school. That year enrollment jumped to almost 500 students and the school placed in the 95th percentile of Iowa Test of Basic Skills. By January of 1980 we had paid off our parish debt and St. Francis was approaching 1500 families. Then, in 1982, our parish was split, reducing us to about 900 families. Undaunted we dedicated our new activity center two years later. It was home to 16 different parish ministries and organizations.

In 2001 we had 70 organizations or ministries with over 2000 volunteers. Our grade school taught over 780 students each year and approximately 300 St. Francis students attend the Diocesan High School at no charge. The parish grew back to over 2700 families and 70% of them contributed treasure to the Church.

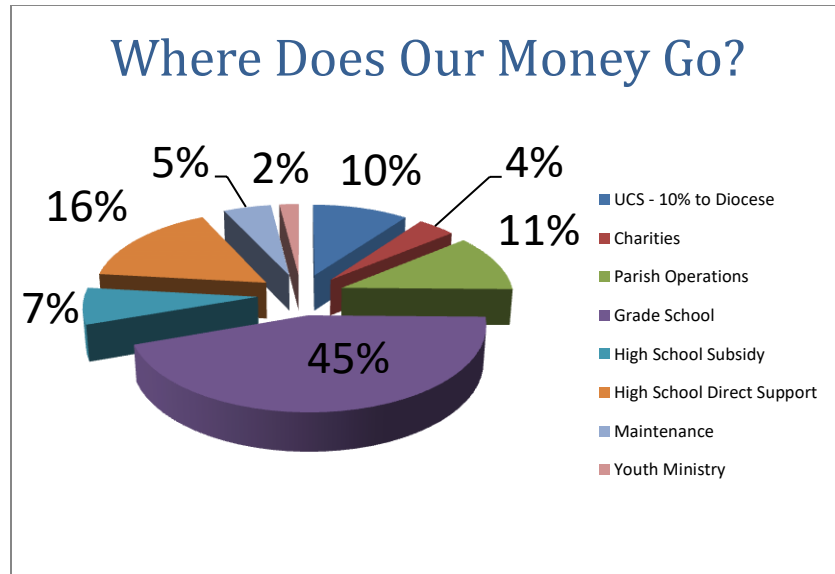
In 2008 the parish had 3000 families and St. Francis experienced its second split: St. Catherine of Sienna was established. The parish dipped back down to 2400 families. The grade school had 795

students at the time of the split. It then started losing students to St. Catherine's which grew its school by adding one grade per year. St. Catherine's parish boundaries housed many wealthy neighborhoods, in which, many wealthy parishioners lived and transferred parish membership from St. Francis. Stewardship positions and leadership had to be replaced. Attendance at Mass felt small in comparison to the "standing-room-only" Masses that St. Francis to which parishioners had become accustomed. And payment of bills had to be delayed, even for several months.

Today, one decade later, and five decades after the Stewardship Way of Life was inaugurated, St. Francis is healthy and strong in all the essential markers of health. We are a parish of 2600 families, totaling 8000 individual persons. School enrollment is at 652, with 150 in PSR, 240 in Catholic High School, and 200 youth in Youth Ministries. There are over 200 stewardship opportunities or parish ministries available with 39% of parishioners giving their time and talent. The average tithing per household is 3.4%, or \$1,777 per household, with 60% of parishioners tithing something. We have an annual budget of 5.1 Million dollars with an average weekly collection of ninety-two thousand dollars, over and above which we received extraordinary gifts as well. Our school remains a mission of the parish without charging a tuition and keeping fees to about \$400 per student. But these are merely the temporal indications of parish health.

	National Average	Average of Stewardship Parishes	St. Francis of Assisi in Wichita, KS in 2017
Treasure	\$517 per household	\$656 per household	\$1777 per household
Volunteering	27% of parishioners	32.13% of parishioners	39% of parishioners turned in forms; more volunteer
Spiritual Index	46.3% of parishioners	59.7% of parishioners	---
Parish Outreach	3.34 per parish	4.6 per parish	10 at SFA

More importantly, an average of forty people makes use of the sacrament of reconciliation every day. Over 250 people attend daily Mass. Approximately 3600 (48%) of our parishioners attend Mass each weekend. 800 faithful souls participate in perpetual adoration that is now in its 31st year at St. Francis. Fifteen men from our parish have been ordained. Six women have become sisters. Two men have become brothers. We currently have 4 young men in the seminary. We have two sessions of RCIA/C each year averaging thirty-five new Catholics annually. We have dozens of small faith sharing / study groups, several parish retreats, parish workdays, dinners, dances, all adding up to constant on-campus activity. And we pray that what we can say quantitatively is matched qualitatively by a truly interior discipleship to the person of Jesus Christ.



This is Not a Program. It's a Way of Life.

Stewardship is a way of life that expresses in work what people hold to in faith. Stewardship is to discipleship what exercise is to a gym membership: being a member in name is necessarily not being a member in fact. Disciples are stewards or else they are not truly disciples. At the outset, it's important that parishioners understand the nature of the commitment stewardship requires. An understanding of its rewards will come in time, with experience. One fundamental truth can never be stated too frequently: The Lord will not be outdone in generosity. After all, will "He who did not spare his own Son but handed him over for us all not also give us everything else along with him" (Rom 8:32)?

The initial impetus for a parish-wide initiative in stewardship must come from the pastor, whose own enthusiasm for the concept of stewardship must be unwavering. As a priest of God, another Christ, the pastor is the shepherd of his people. The pastor's primary responsibility is to lead them to know, love, and serve God in this life and to help prepare to enter eternal life in union with God.

Stewardship will produce benefits that will reach into every corner of personal and collective spirituality. It will help parishioners to know God better, to increase their love of God and neighbor, and give them frequent opportunities to serve God and others more fully

Stewardship Begins with the Pastor.

Everyone knows that pastors have their hands full. Many are overworked. All are heavily burdened. Far from being just another responsibility, stewardship enables parishioners to approach their Savior, their pastor, and their neighbors with their hands full - full of time and talent and treasure - to be shared. Stewardship will free priests from many of the time-stealing details of administration, giving them more time for shepherding and giving the spiritual guidance only they can give.

Stewardship is the answer to the problem of overworked priests and the baptismal right of every lay person in the Church.

Stewardship is the Lay Apostolate in Parish Life

Stewardship is nothing other than the lay apostolate in action within the parish. Under priestly supervision parish leaders and volunteers can take over the responsibility for meeting the physical needs of the parish. Compassionate, caring volunteers, can assume some of the spiritual work to be done. Knowledgeable and articulate lay men and women can teach, lead study groups, aid in marriage prep, catechize youth, write articles, start programs, and lead liturgical training. And the deeply spiritual of the parish can offer intercession both at Mass and Perpetual Adoration so as to win “grace for timely help (Heb 4:16).”

Getting Started and Gaining Momentum:

There are practical steps to developing stewardship. Like the early church itself, stewardship in your parish will grow from a small nucleus of dedicated parishioners. The apostles and first disciples set out to change the world; such was the fervor of their belief. You need only act in belief, and then, step-by-step, you can change your parish.

Seek out a core group of dedicated parishioners and start a Stewardship Council

Before the discussion of stewardship is taken to the entire parish it should center on a small group of dedicated parishioners. Careful selection of this lay leadership is critical to the ultimate success of stewardship.

A good place to begin the selection is at Mass. Our experience at St. Francis has taught us is that the people most committed to stewardship are Eucharistic people, daily communicants, in most cases. Those people in your parish most likely to possess the enthusiasm, the energy, the deep belief necessary to win others to a new way in life will draw their strength from the Lord’s Body and Blood. Parishioners who fully appreciate the magnitude of Jesus gift of self will be most likely to fully appreciate the debt we owe in return.

Then, as much as possible, try to locate this admirable spirituality in a person with practical skills in dealing with people. Try to find committee members who are respected in the parish for their leadership abilities, as well as their devotion to the faith. This central committee must be a working group. So look for spiritual people who have demonstrated persistence and determination in getting practical things done.

There is no magic number for the size of council. In our case we built the entire apparatus of thousands volunteers and nearly 200 organizations/ministries from a nucleus of just 12 people. In fact, a smaller tightly focused council will offer unanimity that might not be possible with a larger group. Total commitment from the core committee will be the wellspring of a similar conviction from the parish at large.

As our parish grew in numbers we expanded our Stewardship Council to 24 members. But in order to perpetuate such a large operation, today we have five councils: Pastoral, Stewardship, Operations, Communications, and School. These five are comprised of 55 people who delegate the stewardship efforts of all our organizations and ministries.

Encourage your small group to think big

Once the members of the stewardship council have been identified draw them into a series of meetings for personal exploration of God's invitation to stewardship. The fifth book of the bible is one good place to begin. In the book of Deuteronomy the phrase, "God gives" appears over 100 times. The word "tithes" appears almost 40 times in the Old Testament, 11 times in the new. 16 of the 38 major parables concern stewardship. Open discussions about the biblical underpinnings of the concept will foster renewed personal understanding of the obligation we all face to lives based on the scriptures. And the scriptures abound with the descriptions of the rewards both temporal and spiritual, both earthly and eternal, waiting for those who give generously of what has been given to them.

Another important source to explore in these meetings would be the Bishop's pastoral letter *Stewardship: a Disciple's Response*. If the stewardship committee can lock on an individual and collective appreciation of the truths in the scriptures and in the pastoral letter about stewardship, the likelihood of the majority of the parishioners accepting it becomes so much greater.

An third possible source for reflection on the meaning of stewardship could be *A Grateful Response to God's Abundant Gifts*, by Fr. Jarrod Lies, St. Francis' current pastor.

Now is no time for small thinking. Invite the stewardship council to imagine the ideal parish, your parish made close to perfect by the workings of the Holy Spirit and the time and talent of its congregation. And remember, "Without vision, people perish" (Prov 29:18). It is vitally important that the council operate from the outset with a vision. It is equally important that they do not impose that vision by force on the parish as a whole. Propose an idea. Listen to the parish. Then let the parish decide what it would like to become; but all in good time.

Plan a series of introductory talks to the parish on the subject of stewardship

We recommend a series of consecutive Sunday homilies wherein the pastor begins to relay the importance of a parish-wide sharing of time, talent, and treasure. Ground these exhortations in Jesus' quiet teachings and New Testament stories most of us learned as children. The pastor can begin to build a comprehensive understanding of stewardship by showing how our Savior's words are weaved with the threads of stewardship throughout.

It is also appropriate that members of the stewardship council share their own personal witness talks. They can offer a synopsis of their experiences, especially concerning the early exploratory stages of their involvement. If being involved in stewardship has affected the life of one or other of the council members it would be good for those person to share and account of stewardship's unique ability to change lives and people, to call forth the very best that is in them.

*From the beginning let parishioners know that **everyone** is important, that everyone has something of deep significance to contribute.*

The invitation to stewardship must go out to everyone in the parish: young and old, healthy and infirmed, rich and poor. Stewardship extends into every area of human life, even to the smallest act of kindness. Such an act, Jesus told us, will not go without its reward. Even those who might be

suffering from ill health can intercede for the parish, offer their sufferings, write letters of appreciation to stewards, and send cards to the bereaved or the dying.

What is true is this: people are looking for standards. People desire clear expectations that allow them to imitate Jesus and direct their activities. Consistent emphasis on stewardship calls people to a more faithful way of life that directs them to the happiness promised in the Beatitudes.

Ask people what they want

In the beginning, listen. Listen a lot. For purposes of gathering information about the real or perceived needs of your parish, you should plan some kind of program where all parishioners can gather in small groups to explore the parish's potential.

At the group meeting it would be good to pose for discussion such general questions as:

- What is an ideal parish?
- What might stand in the way of our parish achieving this ideal status?
- If our parish enjoyed unlimited resources what would be our dreams and goals for us?

Someone in each group should assume the responsibility for the accurate recording and reporting back to the stewardship council of the comments made in these small sessions.

The information gathered in these informal sessions will provide the raw materials for the initial time and talent signup sheets. Based on the assessed needs of the parish, as identified by the parishioners themselves, the stewardship council must assign job functions pertinent to each need. For example, if a significant number of parishioners have commented about infants crying at Mass, it might behoove the committee to establish a babysitting service for those Masses most frequently attended by parents with small children. Or, if a number of participants of the small group sessions have mentioned the fading exterior of the rectory, it's logical to form a carpentry and painting crew.

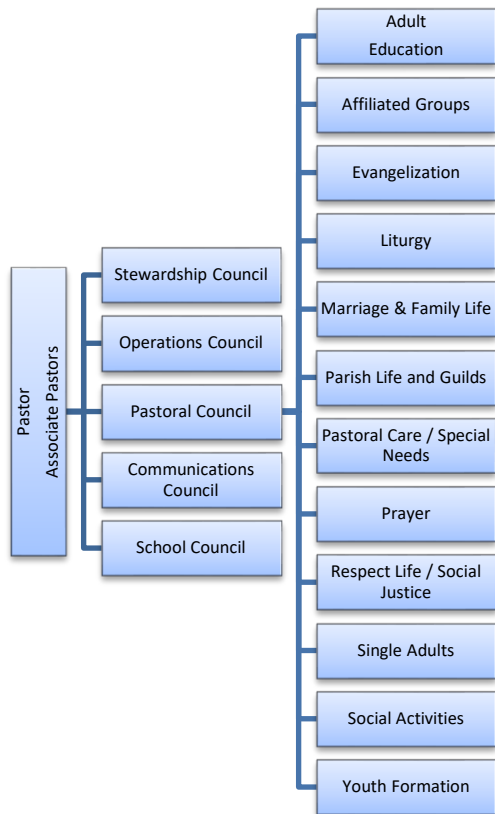
Tell the parishioners what they've said

Assemble the results of the needs assessment and report them as soon as possible to the parish at large. Here at St. Francis we found that a parish activity of some kind is the ideal vehicle for transferring this information. The exact nature of the activity is immaterial, as long as it appeals to a large percentage of the parish community. The gathering should ideally be perceived as a gift to the parishioners for their initial ideas about and support for stewardship.

We put on an annual parish dinner for purposes of communicating either the results of the needs survey or to update them with an annual "State of the Parish" address given by council chairs.

The dinner is reserved for adults only. All adults in the parish are formally invited to attend with RSVP's mandatory. There is no charge for the dinner nor does it require volunteer labor from the parishioners – every parishioner should feel free to participate in and enjoy the dinner. The entire function does not last more than two and a half hours. Here at St. Francis it has been our experience that the inevitable increase in the offertory more than offsets the cost of the dinner.

The business portion of the gathering should be exceptionally well organized. From the outset the parish must see that the stewardship leaders are attuned to their wishes and prepare to offer workable plans of attack for solving the parish's problems, taking advantage of its opportunities, and making progress on its vision and goals. At the inaugural gathering the Stewardship Council should address the needs survey and the immediate means of answering those needs.



Creating a Framework

The people in your parish will respond to opportunities to offer God their basic goodness. You need to create an organizational structure wherein individual acts of stewardship can accumulate to the greater good of the parish, the community, and the church.

Remember: Personal invitation is a must. Some people may feel that if they are not personally invited then they may not be personally wanted. Most people are waiting to be asked. It is our experience that a person-to person ask almost always gets an affirmative response or a truly legitimate reason as to why not. It is part of our stewardship culture at St. Francis to always say "Yes" in imitation of the Blessed Virgin Mother and St. Francis. To say "yes" is to accept the compliment of one person acknowledging another's talents. It is a privilege to be asked to serve.

Establish some structure in your parish

As the spiritual, social, and physical needs of your parish are first identified and then refined in the days and weeks following a Pastoral Council can help to channel volunteer time and talent to those needs. The council would usually consist of the pastor, associate pastor(s), a chair person, a vice-chair person, a secretary, and a representative from each of the different areas of parish life. As our parish has grown our councils and committees have also grown.

Most spiritual and social needs of the parish will fall under the plans of work under a few primary areas. These could include representatives for activities, communication, education, human relations, prayer, and finance. Each of these committees could serve as a sounding board, a point of reference for all the more specific parish groups operating in that general area.

Some examples

The Activities Committee would logically be working with such new and established parish groups such as the ladies auxiliary, the men's club, sports groups, 50+ club, Harvest House, and Mardi Gras dance.

The Communications Committee would assume responsibility for the timely publication of a parish newsletter giving specific and repeated attention to the works of stewardship in the parish and greater community. This council would serve as a kind of clearing house for all communications sent to parishioners, integrating all those messages to the central theme of stewardship.

The Education Committee would naturally involve itself with groups concerned with R.C.I.A., Adult education, bible studies, and retreats. The education committee would work with all these groups in solidifying the parish's efforts in each of those specialized endeavors and in developing an overall program that addresses the needs of parishioners at all age levels in an atmosphere of a Christian community.

The Family Life Committee would encompass such groups as welcoming committee, mother's group, nursery during Mass, marriage encounter, Mom's Day Out, young married couples, and other groups which promote and support the family.

The Liturgy Committee would center its activity in the liturgy where it would coordinate the individual efforts of smaller groups consisting of Extraordinary ministers of communion, Mass greeters, offertory gifts, lectors, ushers, servers, and music.

The Prayer Committee would coordinate the prayer chain, perpetual adoration, prayer groups, rosary groups, pre-Mass rosary, family prayer, religious vocation promotion and several others.

The Special Needs Committee would focus on supporting various ministries in the parish such as bereavement, funeral dinners, respect life, visit ill and elderly, parish nurse ministry, ministry for disabilities, and social justice ministry among others.

The Youth Committee would encompass youth liturgy participation, the various scouts groups, Junior Catholic Youth Ministry, High School Catholic Youth Ministry, the Sunday pre-school, the elementary school, the diocesan or parish high school, the Parish School of Religion, confirmation coordinator and so on.

The Finance Committee would bring under its umbrella all financial and fiduciary obligations of the parish.

With all these appointed committees there should be some method of establishing terms of service, so that all willing parishioners find the opportunity to share their time and talent. Couples can serve together on these committees, making the service to themselves and perhaps more productive to the parish.

No committees for the sake of committees

The outline above is offered to you for the sake of general example only. Please remember that simplest is best, and those structures of organization are clear, straightforward, and adapted to the precise needs of your parish are those mostly likely to make living the stewardship way of life within the parish community efficient and effective.

At the heart of stewardship lie prayer and personal commitment; everything else is just machinery. But machines can help us in our work.

To the degree that your parish can integrate the disparate activities / ministries of all these groups your parish can succeed in its commitment to God's work in your community. We strongly recommend at least an annual review, specific goals, and to date results of each committee, primary or otherwise. Stewardship has no room for inertia. You should examine your parishes structure the same way you examine its collective conscience:

- Are we doing what we set out to do?
- Are we serving the people we hope to serve?
- Has the need changed in the meantime – are we still working in the same social, liturgical, or financial environment that we were a year ago?

These are the sorts of operational questions that ought to present themselves in an annual review of your parish's structure and methodology of stewardship.

Gathering the Harvest.

There comes a time when you must put the theory of stewardship into practice. The initial appeal to the parish must be thoughtfully coordinated and conducted. Parishioners will find new confidence in parish leadership when they see that their offers of stewardship are taken seriously and applied quickly and efficiently. In the administration of stewardship lies ultimate credibility for its worth and its goal for bringing people closer to God.

Make volunteering easy, unavoidable, unavoidably rewarding.

Even more important than the restructuring of the parish organization which underpins stewardship, is the structuring of the opportunities for volunteerism itself. After having asked parishioners for their opinions about the problems, option, potential for confronting the parish, it becomes vitally important that you now give them every chance to respond directly and meaningfully to the call of stewardship. Don't be afraid to ask for a commitment in writing.

The following steps represent one way of giving everyone in the parish an opportunity to answer the call in a way that is both personally fulfilling and contributory to the common good.

Send Stewardship Packets to Every Parishioner.

Time and Talent Sign-up sheet

This packet should include a time and talent sign-up sheet which has been carefully constructed to select job whose completion will advance in a visible way the answering of the need in the parish. For example, if your parish has set the establishment of a perpetual adoration society as a prime spiritual goal, the exact number of volunteers necessary should be specified; that way, the individual volunteer as one of an elite 168 (one hour per week) charter member of the society.

We have included a time and talents signup sheet we have used here at St. Francis, but use only those parts of it that apply to your situation, of course, your own sign-up sheet should reflect the unique requirements of your parish and its people.

On every sign-up sheet be sure to include an offer of time and talent not specified on the sheet itself. Give people the opportunity to exercise their creativity, to propose an unusual way of serving God and neighbor

Tithing Card

A sample card is enclosed. And please consult the discussion of tithing which follows in the section below, “the bible is not a math book.”

Return envelope

A courtesy that will guarantee confidentiality and encourage a prompt response.

Cover letter

The pastor should draft a personal letter to the parishioners inviting participation in stewardship and referring to the messages to be contained in the homilies on the Sundays after the mailing.

The bible is not a math book

Too often stewardship is received in the parish as little more than a glorified fund-raising mechanism. Nothing could be further from the truth.

The gift of one’s treasure is simply an act of being honest with God.

It is certainly possible to offer parishioners a figure that will help them determine an appropriate sharing of their treasure with the church; but it would usually be a mistake to assign a strict percentage to a specified aggregate of income as the sole quantifier of a tithe.

So, please consider very carefully the prescriptions you offer your people as guides for giving. The word “tithe” means a tenth, 10%. At St. Francis we suggest 8% directed to the parish and 2% reserved for other worthy causes such as the diocese and the good works of the church here and abroad.

St. Francis considers providing a catholic education for its parishioner’s children, regardless of their parent’s income, to be a mission of the parish. We do not have tuition for our school. However, our school system has the same expenses – salaries, utilities, books, supplies, and maintenance – as any other school system. The key to providing a tuition free catholic education program is true stewardship. Parishioners actively support the effort by returning a portion of their time, talent, and treasure to God in thanksgiving for the many gifts he has given him.

Here at St. Francis we ask each parent to complete a pledge card. The amount of the tithe indicated on the card should never be questioned. It is a pledge to God stemming from one’s trust. A pledge requires that one be honest with God. The amount indicated, however, should be contributed. If amounts contributed do not match amounts pledged, the pastor should send a letter indicating in positive terms the disparity. Frequent monitoring is definitely called for – the costs of Catholic education are constant. A personal visit with the pastor should be offered to any parishioner who, for whatever reasons, is experiencing difficulty in fulfilling a tithe.

Some parishioners will desire to grow toward 10% incrementally. But this should be constantly reviewed. What served as a perfectly honest pledge in the beginning may become completely dishonest in later years. If person thinks nothing of the check he writes to fulfill a stewardship pledge that person has not thought enough about the size of the pledge. Jesus gave his entire self for us. He paused in the Garden of Gethsemane, in a bloody sweat, because of the magnitude of the sacrifice he was about to make. If our own sacrifices do not give us pause, then we are not really sacrificing.

Sunday Mass is Not Optional

From the outset it must be made known that Mass on Sundays and Holy Days is non-negotiable. Parents with students in Catholic schools must see Sunday Mass as the first and primary classroom of the Catholic School. Failure to attend Sunday Mass is a choice not to attend Catholic schools.

Plan for the collection of the stewardship envelopes

The stewardship packets described above should be mailed so that they will arrive in parishioners' mailboxes the Monday or Tuesday after the pastor has begun a series of homilies on stewardship.

The pastor and assistant priests should base their homilies on the concept of stewardship for at least three consecutive Sundays. At the same time, the parish bulletin and all other methods of congregational communication should carry news of the envelopes' mailing and return.

A couple of vehicles will serve for the collection of envelope. On a specified Sunday, parishioners, may simply bring their envelopes to Mass and drop them in a highly visible basket on entry to the church. These envelopes may then be brought to the altar at the Offertory as part of a special liturgy that, from the beginning of Mass to its end, evokes the selfless spirit of stewardship in imitation of the sacrifice of our savior.

We recommend, however, when introducing stewardship for the first time, a slightly more complicated, but potentially far more effective process: home visits. Home visitation is a visible sign of human outreach, which stands at the heart of stewardship.

At least two months before the actual date of collection, parish leadership of all parish councils, should meet to plan the means by which parishioners will be contacted. Recruitment of home-visitiation volunteers will naturally be a priority. These volunteers should probably number at least ten percent of parish family membership.

It's usually a good idea to transfer the names and addresses of all families in the parish to index cards. These cards may then be sorted according to geographical location and assigned to individual volunteers.

The date for the actual collection of the envelopes should be as widely publicized as possible. Every active member of the parish should be expecting the arrival of the volunteers collecting the envelope through home visitation.

On collection day, invite all volunteers to meet at the Church for a brief meeting before going out to make their calls.

Volunteer visitors should follow these few simple rules.

First of all, all volunteers should turn in their personal envelopes containing their pledges of time, talent, and treasure. It's important that each volunteer be able to ask other parishioners for their cards, knowing that his or her own commitment to stewardship has been solidified.

Volunteers should always make their calls in pairs.

Volunteers should make certain that all envelopes they receive are carefully sealed. Confidentiality is an absolute requirement of the whole pledging and collection process. We're involved in a spiritual reawakening, after all, and the pledges of stewardship represent a contact between the individual conscience and God.

Volunteers should review the names of the families they have been asked to visit. If, for any reason, a visit by a particular volunteer might cause discomfort for either the volunteer or the family, that volunteer should exchange a card with another person.

The visit itself should be conducted in a spirit of open and easy friendliness. The visit should be leisurely but not intrusive in its length. Of course, thanking the family for their participation in stewardship should conclude the visit.

Stewardship should be discussed in broad, general terms. Should a family or parishioner voice complaints about stewardship or wish to discuss it in detail, the volunteers should assure the person that someone will call soon to pursue complaints or questions. The person's card should then be returned to the pastor or lay leader with the notation that further individual discussion is required.

At all costs, volunteers must avoid any comments to parishioners that might be construed as negative.

All envelopes should be returned to the lay leaders at church by a specific date. If some parishioners are not home at the time of the initial visit, the volunteers should keep those cards and phone sometime the following week.

Sort and record the time, talent, and treasure cards.

The stewardship committee assumes sole responsibility for this all-important activity. It goes without saying that the good people of the stewardship council must guard the pledges they record.

Pledges of time and talent should be apportioned to a specific volunteer activity. A separate list should be maintained for each activity, on which the names and phone numbers of the new volunteers are recorded. Upon completion these lists should be distributed to appropriate chairpersons, show with designated committee members assume responsibility for calling each volunteer, thanking the person for his commitment of service, and informing the person of upcoming applications for their time and talent. If no immediate activity is anticipated in that particular capacity, the volunteer should be so informed.

It will likely happen that some volunteer activities will be over-subscribed. If you discover that some functions have more volunteers than can possibly be used, contact some of those volunteers, thank them for their kindness, explain the overstaffing problem and ask them if they would be willing to redirect their generosity to an activity needing additional help.

The Parish Pastoral Council should monitor carefully this whole callback process. The council should follow up with each committee chair person to make certain that every volunteer is contacted.

We can't emphasize enough the importance of personal contact.

Having volunteered their time and talent, having been honest with the Lord in sharing their treasure, parishioners deserve a personal reply to their generosity. Failure to respond to a pledge of stewardship can easily lead to feelings of anger or frustration.

If a person is not personally invited they may feel they are not personally wanted. Please do everything in your power to insure that every offer of stewardship is recognized, acknowledged, and applied.

Don't forget the young people.

Stewardship concerns standards: standards for our relationship with God and with each other. No age group is more concerned with standards than young people. You can recruit their participation in the same ways that you seek their parents' – with belief and enthusiasm.

Young people's opinion matters. Their ideas are worthy to hear. They know when they are not heard and they know when they are being treated with platitudes. You must communicate to them that they have wonderful talents, exceptional energies, and special insights of inconceivable worth to the parish and its people.

In the same way that you chose the Stewardship Council, look for a core group of young people with faith and the fortitude to recruit others to the works of stewardship. If you can recruit active young people to your core group, often times, their friends will follow. Look for teenaged leaders in exactly the way you look for adult leaders.

And, by all means, never miss an opportunity to recognize the good that these young people accomplish.

The diocese of Wichita has been blessed with a large amount of vocations. In 2017 and 2018 we ordained 20 men to the priesthood. Another 5 from our diocese were ordained around the nation at the same time. Why? The stewardship spirituality. The core of stewardship spirituality is that all is gift from God and God gave himself completely in his Son. When one truly knows this then it is instinctual that the only gift worthy of his Son is the gift of my very self. There is an increase of vocations in Wichita because the spirituality of stewardship is ultimately a spirituality of self-gift.

Communicate The Ongoing works of stewardship

Parishioners need and deserve frequent reminders of the continuing activities of stewardship throughout the parish and the community. Frequent written communications and social media posts

stimulate the parish's vision of stewardship; they document its needs and they announce opportunities for their fulfillment. Public recognition of stewardly works is always appropriate. While the rewards of stewardship are ultimately spiritual and personal, there is no reason why kindness and generosity should pass without comment. Acknowledgement of good works can be inspiring to others as well.

By all means, consider the publication of a monthly newsletter providing up-to-the-moment reports on all the manifestations of stewardship in your parish. Make sure that the weekly bulletin gives notice of upcoming events and ongoing activities. The use of a public digital calendar on one's website and the publishing of an annual parish events calendar can greatly help with this. The priest may also want to make short announcements at Mass of particular events or special announcements.

You might also want to publish organizations together with the names of their chair persons on a parish website. These more complex publishing assignments should be taken on by the expertise of men and women on the Communications Council. They in turn can recruit photographers, writers, typists, artists, and printers in the parish who can bring specialized skills to the undertaking.

Remember the Power of Renewal

As stewardship grows, it will be especially important to return annually to its roots. An annual stewardship renewal will produce benefits ranging from reinvigorated personal commitment to parish-wide refocusing of volunteered time and talent.

The annual stewardship renewal process promotes the stewardship of time, talent, and treasure. It provides parishioners with the opportunity to make further discernment of their talents, reevaluate their commitment of time, and make a re-examination of the portion of their treasure they return to God. It takes place in a four-week period ending with the weekend before Thanksgiving when the Time and Talent Forms and Treasure Cards are returned in order to focus on giving back to God with a grateful heart. The greater the gratitude, the greater one's joy. As Bishop Gerber stated, "A grateful heart silences a complaining voice."

All of the following are a part of the renewal process:

- the Pastor's homilies at Mass
- lay witness presentations,
- parish newspaper articles on stewardship spotlighting the parish organizations,
- bulletin notices,
- and a stewardship fair.

A special mailing of Time and Talent Forms and Treasure Cards includes the parish booklet describing all organizations and activities. The annual parish dinner provides a forum for the Pastoral Council to recognize accomplishments of parish organizations. Youth are included in the renewal process and receive their own Time and Talent Forms and envelopes. The Pastor Gives special homilies at the daily school Masses.

An Invitation

At St. Francis of Assisi Parish, we firmly believe that stewardship is a way of life. All we have comes from God. As responsible stewards of all we have received and in gratitude for all we have been given, we return our time, talent, and treasure to God. We also firmly believe that stewardship is primarily based on a person's need to give in gratitude, rather than on the church's need to receive. Stewardship is not about fund-raising or volunteer recruitment, it is about spirituality, education, and conversion. The God who is the giver of all good gifts has made us, in his image, givers of our own good gifts.

Eight Fundamental Beliefs of Stewardship

We Believe...

- ...everything we have received is a gift from God (i.e., life, love, health, talents, family, vocation, etc.), therefore we are called to develop and share our gifts sacrificially, generously and proportionally.
- ...stewardship is primarily about faith. It is an invitation by God for the faithful in each parish to grow in a deeper relationship with Jesus Christ.
- ...stewardship is a spirituality that builds a way of life, expressed not in a single action or even in a number of actions but in an entire way of life. It is a committing of one's total self to the Lord.
- ...stewardship is characterized by hospitality, prayer, formation, and service.
- ...our bishop, pastors, and parish leaders have a crucial responsibility to live stewardship and motivate the faithful to follow their lead in order for stewardship to be a spirituality that builds a way of life.
- ...stewardship should be integrated into all aspects of parish and diocesan mission and ministry.
- ...the universal Church, including parish and diocesan missions, should be supported primarily by the generous, sacrificial, and proportionate sharing of time, talent, and treasure of parishioners to their parish.
- ...we are called in scripture to return to God the first of our fruits, through our tithe.

Ten Most Important Ingredients of a Successful Stewardship Parish.

Belief

Pastors and lay leaders must exhibit absolute trust and confidence in stewardship as a way of life. Their belief in its results and its rewards must be constant and unwavering.

Prayer

We can never pray enough, especially in regard to stewardship. The guidance of the Holy Spirit will make the little decisions regarding your parish's stewardship so much easier, so much more successful. Stewardship is, first and last, spiritual activity and prayer is the lifeblood of the Spirit. Make sure that every parish activity even remotely associated with stewardship begins with prayer.

Spirituality

Conversion to the stewardship way of life has eternal consequences. The benefits which stewardship achieves – e.g. a new rosary group in the parish, increased enrollment in adult education or R.C.I.A., a priestly or religious vocation from the parish – are signs that the Kingdom of God is present in our parish here and now. This is preparation for the eternal as we continue to seek with ardent love that Kingdom of God yet to come – as we seek our heavenly home.

Planning

Even as we keep our eyes fixed on the everlasting, we must make plans for the here and now. The Lord has counseled us to be wary, as the householder who knows not the hour when the may break in and steal, as the virgins who wait with their lamps for the bridegroom.

Ongoing management of stewardship calls for foresight and anticipation. Organization is the key to success.

Communication

Continuing education concerning the demands of stewardship results in continuing enthusiasm about its rewards. The right hand must know what the left hand is doing. In a spirit of frankness and humility, every parishioner should know the who's, where's, when's, and why's of stewardship activity.

Hospitality

From their collective heart, good stewards say nothing as often as, "Welcome!" Everyone has something to contribute. Everyone is needed. Everyone should be made to feel as such.

Here at St. Francis we have enjoyed wonderful success with our "welcoming committee." These outgoing groups of volunteers visit new parishioners, extend to them the warmth of our familial spirit, invite them to participate in our parish activities, present them with information about the parish, and given them a small gift from the parish.

Consensus

Stewards do not have to vote. The good to be done should ultimately be obvious to everyone. The progress of all meetings should follow this general outline: pray, present, discuss, listen, reflect, summarize, and reach a consensus.

Inclusion

Include everyone in the invitation to participate. Recognize the unique contributions that every parishioner can make. We are all members of the Mystical Body of Christ. Stewardship celebrates that fact.

Gratitude

Your mom was right... never, never forgetting to say, "Thank you." Every gift of time, talent, and treasure – no matter how small or insignificant it may seem – should call forth an expression of gratitude. Remember the widow's mite – she gave all that she had.

Vision

Vision is an essential part of our life of faith. As Proverbs pointedly states, “Where there is no vision, people perish” (29:18); but where there is vision there is success. And the bible goes on to say, “Vision is a witness for the appointed time, a testimony to the end; wait for it, it will surely come” (Hab 2:3). A parish gains its vision when it strives to invite every member into dialogue about their hopes, dreams, needs and desires for your parish.

Retain and cherish your parish’s vision of what it might yet be. Hold fast to your goals in the face of the momentary disappointment, the temporary setback.

But, please, temper your enthusiasm with a healthy dose of reality. Parish involvement in stewardship will at the outset be something less than unanimous. It may in fact be minimal. Remember the Lord’s teaching about the mustard seed. Plant the seed. Then imagine what it, and you, might become. With stewardship, and the faith that supports it, all things are possible.

This is how stewardship is done at St. Francis of Assisi Catholic Parish, Wichita, Kansas. We wish you every success in developing the Stewardship way of life in your parish.

Appendix A: Best and Worst Practices for Stewardship Renewal

Best Practices for Stewardship Renewal

(Taken from Catholic Diocese of Wichita, *Formation*, 21-30):

- Clear vision and mission statement
- Bulletin inserts
- Stewardship brochures
- Parish newsletter: parish events and activities; stewardship messages
- Stewardship council
- Leadership retreats
- Parish ministry directory/booklet,
- Lay witness presentations
- Welcoming committee
- Registering new parishioners
- New parishioner receptions
- Ministry fairs
- Parish dinner
- Annual parish stewardship renewal
- Time and Talent Commitment forms
- Appreciation
- Accountability
- Parish pastoral plan
- Periodic surveys
- Parish mission
- Home visits

Worst Practices: 10 key mistakes to avoid:

(Taken from McGread, Blog, June 10, 2010)

- Too many stewardship Sundays: “stewardship fatigue” is a reality, so at some point you have to conclude the renewal, even if the response is not what you’d hoped for.
- Conflicting events/ announcements during your stewardship Sunday
- Lay witness is off-message: your lay witness speakers shouldn’t preach about the meaning of stewardship, but rather, simply share how they have practiced stewardship in their lives.
- Allowing sign-up sheets during your ministry fair: don’t do this! The problem with this method is that it does not provide any accountability. The solution is to have interested parishioners sign up on a *commitment card* instead.
- Separating time & talent from treasure
- Poor “build up” to commitment Sunday: it needs to be clear that commitment Sunday is the “big day.”

- An uninspiring commitment Sunday: teams of parishioners should be handing out commitment cards at the doors of the church. The pastor should preach at all masses, and the homily should be 100% about stewardship. It should be an inspiring call to action.
- No follow-up announcements
- Poor ministry follow-up: not following up with parishioners who have signed up for a ministry has been called “stewardship suicide.”
- Lacking a spiritual focus: above all, it needs to be a time of spiritual conversion, in which parishioners respond joyfully, with gratitude to god, by investing themselves in the faith community.”

Appendix B -Do's and Don'ts of Financing Schools: Legal Considerations

Dos:

- Incorporate an expectation of active stewardship into all parish activities, not just schools: for example, sacramental preparation, parish religious education, use of facilities, serving in leadership, serving in ministries.
- Review enrollment status on the basis of active stewardship. Consider attendance at Sunday Mass, regular participation in the sacraments, participation in religious education, service to parish ministries, and public support for church teaching, as well as making and keeping a good faith tithing pledge.
- Invite all parish members to complete an annual stewardship commitment of time, talent, and treasure.
- When giving records are reviewed, review all families who have pledged. For example, send letters to all families who are not current, not just school families.
- If your parish has or wants to have a “tithing policy,” have it reviewed by the Chancery or diocesan counsel.

Don'ts:

- Do not specify an amount that a family must contribute to ensure admission to school, or otherwise “tie” a family’s financial contribution to enrollment.
- Do not allow parishioners to choose between making contributions to the parish or paying the actual cost of education (i.e. tuition).
- Do not deny admission to a student on the sole basis that the parents do not make a financial contribution to the parish.
- Do not apply more pressure to school parents to tithe than others in the parish.
- Do not review only the financial giving of school parents.
- Do not compare the amount parents tithe to the parish to the actual cost of their children’s education.
- Do not ask to review the parishioner’s tax returns; to do so negates the notion of gift.