Reflecting and Methods for Fostering Stewardship of Time and Talent into the Vineyard

“There are different kinds of spiritual gifts, but the same Spirit; there are different forms of service, but the same Lord; there are different workings but the same God who produces all of them in everyone.”

1 Corinthians 12:4-6
“The demands made on people’s time and energy make it more important than ever to recruit, train and recognize gifts of time and talent for the parish…. active involvement of individuals, families, and communities in the mission and ministries of the Church is one of the surest signs of the vitality of any faith community.”

Stewardship: A Disciple’s Response
U.S. Bishops’ Pastoral Letter

“We cannot do everything, but that doesn’t mean we should do nothing. We cannot save everyone, but that doesn’t mean we shouldn’t save some. Don’t let what you cannot do interfere with what you can do.”

The Four Signs of a Dynamic Catholic
Matthew Kelly
LIFE IS YOUR GIFT TO US

God, life is Your gift to us.

Through Baptism, You invite us to share the gift of life in service to others.

Be with us as we choose each day to show Your presence in our world.

Give us the courage to respond to Your call.

We pray especially for those who serve You in all ministries here in our parish. May they continue to bear the Good News through their words and action.

Open the minds and hearts of the many, that they may accept Your challenge to build the kingdom in our parish.

Lord Jesus, You tell us that the meaning of life consists in giving. Help us to realize that it is not riches or power, or fame that gives life meaning. Rather, it is generosity and service to You and others that brings true fulfillment and makes life worthwhile.

May all of our service help us to build Your Kingdom.

Amen.
Introduction

Ministry in parishes thrives, in large part, because of the countless talents shared by members of the faith community. Without the hands – and hearts – of parishioners, many parish ministries and events would struggle or simply fade away.

A successful commitment of Time & Talent does far more than find people to fill slots. In successful stewardship parishes, Time & Talent renewals employ best practices for volunteer management, executed within the context of our faith.

Stewardship parishes recognize a new model of Time offering opportunities and tools to encourage each parishioner to grow in personal relationship with the Lord. Building on that strengthened connection, successful parishes use best practices in volunteer recruitment, management and retention to grow the ranks of parishioners sharing their Talents by taking an active role in ministry and service.

This booklet will:

- Address current facts and figures about volunteerism today.
- Explore a new understanding of the stewardship of “Time.”
- Present a new paradigm; moving from Volunteer to Minister.
- Discuss the value of a gifts discernment process.
- Present best practices in recruitment, training and retention of parish volunteer ministers.
- Provide creative ideas for ministry fairs.
- Offer a frame work for beginning.
“Despite Attempts to Boost Volunteerism, Rate Hits a New Low.” This headline, from a recent issue of *The Chronicle of Philanthropy*, is not news to most Catholic parish leaders. While the article focused on volunteerism within the secular non-profit sector, the headline could just as easily be applied to a story about most Catholic parishes.

The stagnant or declining number of Americans volunteering has been well documented.

According to the United States Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS):

- The volunteerism rate dropped 1.1 percent to 25.4 percent of the population in the year ending September 2013.
- 62.6 million Americans volunteered in 2013, 2 million fewer than in 2012.
- That number represents a 10 year low in the number of volunteers.
- The number of people with a bachelor’s degree or higher fell from a 2009 high of 42.8 percent of all volunteers to 39.8 percent in 2013.
- Despite reports that indicate that younger generations believe volunteering and taking action are the best ways to improve society, volunteer rates were lowest among people aged 20-24, comprising 18.5 percent of all volunteers.
- People aged 35-44 were among the most likely to volunteer (30.6%).
While the national statistics report that 25.4 percent of American adults volunteered at least once in 2013, we know that percentage is much lower when we consider the average Catholic parish population. In his book, *The Four Signs of a Dynamic Catholic*, author Matthew Kelly reports that **6.4% of parishioners contribute 80 percent of the volunteer hours in the average parish.** With Catholic parishioners volunteering in their parishes, on average, at one-quarter the national rate, we have a long way to go to maximize the potential of each parish to become a vibrant center of ministry.

*The Chronicle of Philanthropy* concluded that, “The reality is, volunteer engagement is a reflection of nonprofit capacity, its leadership, its resources, and ability to engage [them].” Our bishops reached this conclusion more than 25 years ago when they wrote in their pastoral letter on stewardship:

“The success or failure of parish programs, the vitality of parish life, or its absence, the ability or inability of a parish to render needed services to its members and the community, depend on all.”

*Stewardship: A Disciple’s Response*
U.S. Bishops’ Pastoral Letter
Time is the ultimate gift, a uniquely valuable treasure bestowed upon us by our generous God. We cannot buy or sell time. We cannot stop it. And, we can never be sure how much of this precious gift has been granted to each individual.

Many 21st century American Catholics believe that people have less free time today than in years past. Author C. Justin Clements, in his book *Time, Talent & Treasure; Reflections on the U.S. Bishops’ Model for Parish Stewardship*, writes, “-Americans incessantly express the feeling that they are overwhelmed by their busy schedules and are constantly pressed for time. Yet when researchers asked people to keep time diaries in order to calculate how much free time they really have, they discovered a discrepancy between what people say and what they report. Researchers found that people actually have almost twice as much free time as they estimate – and certainly much more free time than people had twenty or thirty years ago.”

Traditionally, the words Time and Talent have been used almost interchangeably in Catholic parishes; Time was the number of hours we spent using our Talent to volunteer. Successful stewardship parishes are taking a new approach to stewardship of Time.

This approach to Stewardship of Time:

- Recognizes that every moment is a uniquely precious gift that we can only “use” once.

- Invites and challenges parishioners to prayerfully consider why and how to return Time to the Lord to strengthen their relationship with Him.

- Encourages parishioners to consider how to invest Time serving others.

- Provides methods and tools enabling parishioners to make prayerful, deliberate, written commitments to sharing Time.

- Brings a spiritual focus to a parish stewardship renewal.
Investing Time Serving Others

Certainly working in parish ministry or with any non-profit organization or good cause is time spent serving others. Many Catholics, however, are not actively engaged in a volunteer capacity. Part of this fresh focus includes helping parishioners recognize the many, often subtle ways we can be good stewards of Time. This helps us remember that we serve God by serving others.
Here are just a few examples of lines that might appear on a Commitment of Time “sign-up” form:

- Praying whenever you have a free moment; at a stop light, waiting for your computer to “boot up”, standing in a check-out line or microwaving dinner. It only takes a second to say, “Thank You, God.”
- Reading one scripture passage daily.
- Saying the rosary.
- Taking time for a retreat.
- Reading Catholic inspirational books.
- Asking someone you meet how their day is going, and really listening to their response.
- Writing a thank you card for a kindness received.
- Playing a game with your children that THEY want to play.

“Time” Commitment Process

Separating Time from Talent is a new concept for most Catholics. It is important to communicate with parishioners, and to offer time for the prayer and thoughtful discernment that the process is designed to call forth.

A commitment of Time can be executed as a component of the renewal of Talent, or be implemented as a stand-alone process. Some parishes choose to complete this activity during the increased focus on prayer during Lent or Advent. Timing should be determined based on the overall parish stewardship plan.

COMPONENTS OF THE PROCESS:

- **Plan for pre-commitment communication and formation;** allow 2 – 4 weeks in advance of Commitment Sunday to explain the new focus. Convey the message in as many ways as possible within the parameters of parish resources; bulletin and newsletter articles, direct mail pieces, homilies, lay witness presentations, Mass intentions, etc.
Final Thoughts About “Time”

Perhaps at one time, you heard (or said), “I’d like to help, but I just don’t have time.” The truth is we have all of the time that we need to accomplish God’s plan in our lives, but we choose how to spend that time. We always seem to find the time to spend on those things that we consider to be life’s priorities. The challenge for parishes engaged in the process of a stewardship conversion is finding ways to motivate and encourage parishioners to number faith, and God’s plan for each individual, among their top priorities.

The words of scripture tell us how to do this:

“Rejoice always. Pray without ceasing. In all circumstances give thanks, for this is the will of God for you in Christ Jesus.”

1 Thessalonians 5:16-18

• Engage individual parishioners; offer opportunities for self-reflection and prayer that could include self-assessment exercises, scripture or inspirational reading suggestions, etc.

• Engage the Parish Community; pray a stewardship prayer at every Mass, ask the parish prayer chain to pray for parishioners as they grow in faith, encourage small-group conversation and discernment.

• Develop a commitment form; include options that can be “checked off” as well as room for parishioners to share their unique ways of sharing Time. Consider sheets for different age groups.

• Plan a Commitment Sunday; collaborate with the Liturgy Committee to plan a liturgy to celebrate and offer thanks as parishioners present their completed Time commitments.

• Have a plan to compile the data; responses need not be recorded by individual, but imagine the power of being able to report that hundreds of parishioners have committed to praying for the parish, reading scripture, etc.

• Thank parishioners for their commitments; from the pulpit and individually.

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• Thank parishioners for their commitments; from the pulpit and individually.
A Catholic parish is more than a non-profit organization that provides selected services. A parish is a community of believers, dedicated by baptism and bound together in faith devoted to building God’s kingdom on earth. It stands to reason, then, that those who share their talents with their parish and the broader community are far more than volunteers. These Catholics are ministers, each sharing his or her unique talents to accomplish God’s work. Successful stewardship parishes recognize this important distinction and reflect it in their approach to stewardship of Talent.

A CULTURE OF MINISTRY

Adopting a culture of ministry requires a new way of thinking about all the activities, events and good works that happen in the average parish. In stewardship parishes, the change runs deeper than the language they use (just changing “volunteer” to “minister” is not enough).

Successful stewardship parishes have accomplished a shift in action and attitude:

From Volunteerism/Volunteers
to Ministry/Ministers.

From Time and Talents narrowly defined as special skills
to Gifts for Ministry, broadly defined to include one’s personality, life experiences, strengths.

From Staff and other leaders “do ministry”
to Staff and other leaders empower people and facilitate ministry.

From Focus on tasks, recruitment and filling slots
to Focus on people, understanding the many aspects of gifts-based ministry.
From Volunteering is a duty to Ministry is a loving response to our baptismal call wherein we were gifted by God.

From Volunteering is only for the minority of people who are heavily involved in the parish to Ministry is both a responsibility and a right of all the baptized.

From Volunteers “own” their time and talents and control how they are used to Ministers are stewards of their gifts and use discernment to cooperate with God’s plan for their use.

From Volunteering is only for the “chosen few” who are in the inner circle to Ministry in the Church is diverse and inclusive, welcoming, inviting and open to all.

From There is a scarcity of people and skills and a competition for them to God blesses the parish with an abundance of gifts sufficient for carrying out it’s mission in the world.

From Spirituality is a part of our lives evidenced on Sundays and during prayer to Spirituality is lived daily by faithful stewards. It defines all of the actions of disciples of Christ.

“THAT’S NOT HOW WE DO IT HERE.”

The leaders of St. Everyman Parish believed that they belonged to a welcoming community. Greeters manned the doors at every Mass and coffee and donuts was served two weekends each month. Leaders were always asking people to participate in this activity or that committee, and new people came forward (only occasionally, it seemed) but they drifted away soon enough, leaving the “regulars” dismayed, frustrated and certain that they had done everything possible to get more people involved.
Parishioners of St. Everyman parish heard the invitations to join this or that, and at first quite a few accepted the invitation. Many signed up and waited, but never received a call to serve. Eventually, they stopped trying. Eager to serve and excited about the opportunity, others attended meetings and offered their thoughts, only to be met with comments like:

- “That’s not how we do it here.”
- “We tried that and it didn’t work.”
- “Our parish is different.”
- “You don’t know how things work around here.”
- “We don’t need any new members right now, thanks anyway.”

If we want more people to become active participants in the life of the parish, the atmosphere must become like fertile soil. When they are nurtured and tended well, volunteer ministers are the seeds of parish life that will produce good fruit for years to come.

“And He spoke to them at length in parables, saying: ‘A sower went out to sow. And as he sowed, some seed fell on the path, and birds came and ate it up. Some fell on rocky ground, where it had little soil. It sprang up at once because the soil was not deep, and when the sun rose it was scorched, and it withered for lack of roots. Some seed fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up and choked it. But some seed fell on rich soil, and produced fruit, a hundred or sixty or thirtyfold.’”

Matthew 13:3-8

A Quick Reality Check

“Insanity: doing the same thing over and over again and expecting different results.”

Albert Einstein

Best practices for recruiting, training and retaining parish ministers dictate preparation, energy and on-going effort. All this is needed to
successfully manage that seemingly simple thing we call “Talent”. Some parishes, therefore, have established a “Ministry Coordinator” position to manage the structures and systems that support a vibrant volunteer ministry. Every parish should make establishing this position a goal as part of their long term stewardship plan.

When we talk about best practices, as parish leaders we need to overcome automatic reactions like, “We can’t do that. It’s too much work. Who will do all of this? That might work for big parishes but not for us!” How can we ask others to make the effort to share their talents with the parish if we won’t make the effort to make their experience a good one? **Parishes can begin to increase participation by implementing best practices, one step at a time.** As with all stewardship efforts, the key to success is developing a plan, and moving forward step by step. Catholic parish leaders need to consider “Talent” through new eyes, because *Einstein was right.*

“The demands made on people’s time and energy make it more important than ever to recruit, train, and recognize gifts of time and talent for the parish or diocese. Active recruitment of volunteers is essential to the parish’s and diocese’s stewardship of its own human and financial resources because active involvement of individuals, families, and communities in the mission and ministries of the Church is one of the surest signs of the vitality of any faith community.

To make sure that the time and talent of volunteers are respected and used wisely, dioceses and parishes should invest staff time and budget resources in training and continuing education of volunteers. They should also find appropriate ways to recognize and celebrate the precious gifts of time and talent that people contribute to the Church on behalf of the mission of the Church.

...To ensure that gifts of time and talent receive their proper emphasis and are not overshadowed by efforts to secure gifts of treasure, careful attention should be paid to this important aspect of a total stewardship education program.”
“For we are his handiwork, created in Christ Jesus for the good works that God has prepared in advance, that we should live in them.”

_Ephesians 2:10_

Before parishioners can gratefully return a portion of their talents to God, they must first identify and own them. Sometimes we hear people say, “There’s nothing special about me. I don’t have any particular talent.” Even when people do something really well they deflect praise by saying, “Oh, it’s not all that good. I guess I got lucky.” Catholics of a certain age may have been taught that recognizing their special skills constituted the sin of pride. Catholic parish leaders may have to help some people understand that it is alright to be justifiably proud of the specials skills and talents that God has entrusted to their care.

We must remember that Christ tells us,

“Just so, your light must shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your heavenly Father.”

_Matthew 5:15_
WHAT IS “GIFT DISCERNMENT?”

To really help parishioners discover and own their special gifts, it is important for us to expand our understanding and definition of “talent” beyond what is easily apparent. So often we correlate “talent” only with a person’s occupation or profession, however, this view is very limiting. Not all accountants and financial planners are an automatic fit for the Finance Council.

Many parish efforts to increase participation are driven by the needs of the parish at a given time. We have empty slots and we need “bodies” to fill them. Obviously, the needs of the parish are very important, but successful stewardship parishes recognize that the need of parishioners to serve in a meaningful capacity plays an equally critical role in growing participation.

Gift discernment helps each parishioner go beyond the surface to reach, and sometimes discover for the first time, the special gifts waiting to be “unwrapped”. It opens minds and hearts to new ways to serve the parish and the greater community. Gift discernment also helps the parish as an organization to see the full depth and breadth of the gifts parishioners have to share.

THE GIFT DISCERNMENT PROCESS

The Gallup organization introduced the first version of its on-line assessment, StrengthsFinder, in the 2001 management book, Now, Discover your Strengths. Since 2001, countless business executives, leadership teams, committee members and others have used this self-assessment tool. Terms like Strategic, Maximizer, Arranger, Belief, Responsibility and more are used to identify the sometimes intangible strengths of an individual as a way to help the person seek the right position, and to help the corporation or group maximize skills with individuals and teams.

Corporate America had caught on to something that successful stewardship parishes already knew; people are personally happier, and much more productive for their organization or group, when their special inner talents are brought forth and integrated into their work.

The gift discernment process in a parish can take many forms, from the simple to the complex, but each is designed to help parishioners get in touch with all of the special gifts and talents they have received from our generous God.
Components of an effective Gift Discernment Process include:

- **An assessment reflection/questionnaire**
  
  Gift discernment tools take on many forms. The most common assessments are 1 or 2 pages long and include questions to be answered, or statements to be completed, by each parishioner after thoughtful and prayerful consideration.

  Sample questions and statements might include:
  
  - What is my vocation, occupation or profession?
  - What skills do I bring to my daily work?
  - What do I most like to do in my spare time?
  - What gifts or talents do my family and friends tell me I have?
  - Some of my passions are…
  - A new interest of mine is…
  - A couple of emerging issues I am concerned about are…
  - I like to express myself by….
  - If I had all day to do whatever I chose, what would that be?

- **A timeline for execution**
  
  Gifts discernment is most effective when done as the first component of the annual renewal of Talent. Parish resources will determine the scope of this part of the process. Some gift discernments are designed to be done at home by the individual parishioner. Others are designed to include small and/or large group activities. Still others are designed as half or full day retreat experiences.

  Points to consider:
  
  - How will we explain the process and its benefits to parishioners? (bulletin, homilies, mailing, web-site, kid-mail, prayer chain, other?)
  - Is the process meant for personal reflection only?
  - Will we encourage parishioners to include their family and friends in the discernment?
• Will we encourage and/or arrange for small group formation and discussion?

• Will we ask parishioners to turn in their reflections, and if so, who will compile the information?

• How will we try to match people with the “right” ministry?

Sample gift discernment reflections and questionnaires are available in the Stewardship Toolbox on the Archdiocese of Milwaukee website (www.archmil.org) Parish Stewardship home page.

If your parish is new to gifts discernment, start simply. Design a short reflection/questionnaire, and ask parishioners to prayerfully complete it at home in preparation for their commitment of Talent. Expand the process over time as resources allow. Some form of individual gifts discernment should be part of every annual renewal of talent. Many parishes perform a simple process annually, and conduct a more comprehensive process on a rotating schedule; for example every 3-4 years.

• **On-going stewardship formation and education**

Gifts discernment will be far less effective if it occurs in a vacuum. Continuing stewardship education and formation is critical if our parishes are to achieve long-term increases in the number of parishioners stepping forward to take an active role in parish life and ministries.

A scripture passage that is often connected to a renewal of financial resources takes on a new meaning when we consider it in the realm of sharing our talents. As we become increasingly aware of the unique blend of talents, interests and abilities entrusted to us by God for the purpose of doing His good works, Christ’s words take on a rich, new meaning.

“Much will be required of the person entrusted with much, and still more will be demanded of the person entrusted with more.”

*Luke 12:48*
In stewardship parishes the annual commitment of talent is positioned and communicated as an invitation to participate in ministry rather than a plea for more volunteers. Successful parishes understand, however, that the “nuts and bolts” of the process are as important as the stewardship message and are necessary to help us prepare the fertile soil of a welcoming and inclusive atmosphere.

Some recruitment tools can serve more than one purpose; for instance Ministry Guide entries can be expanded to become job descriptions. It is important to note that creating effective tools is not an “all or nothing” proposition. The key is to begin and build your “tool box” over time, if necessary, as resources allow. This can be a challenging task the first time around, however the benefit is well worth the effort!

If your vision is for a year, plant wheat.
If your vision is for ten years, plant trees.
If your vision is for a lifetime, plant people.

An old Chinese proverb

GETTING READY

Research shows that people want as much information as possible before making a commitment of any kind. One common pitfall for Church ministers, particularly those who have been active and involved for some time, is assuming that everyone knows what their ministry, activity or event is all about. Stewardship parishes encourage time commitments by offering detailed information on every ministry opportunity.

There are two strong recruitment tools that will stimulate participation: a ministry guide and ministry job descriptions.
• **A comprehensive ministry guide**
  A ministry guide is an expanded version of the traditional volunteer sign-up form which details all parish ministries, committees, activities and events. Used during the annual renewal of talent, and included in new parishioner welcome packets, a ministry guide helps parishioners see the full scope of parish life, the opportunities that exist to serve and the ministries that are available from the parish to serve parishioners. Parish and committee resources may dictate the scope of this tool, but to be most effective, a ministry guide should include as much information as possible including:

  • general descriptions of each volunteer ministry opportunity.
  • accurate & honest time commitments.
  • age parameters for participants.
  • contact information for committee/ministry leaders.
  • training requirements; Safeguarding God’s Children, etc.
  • special ministry notes; “This ministry is perfect for families.”
  • easy to complete reply forms.

Some parishes also provide ministry guides for youth and children. Most often developed in cooperation with school and Christian Formation staff, and these guides engage entire families and serve as stewardship formation tools for our youngest stewards.

Review your ministry guide annually to be sure that contact information, training requirements and other information is current. Reviewing the guide also provides an opportunity to add new ministry opportunities.

*Special Note: Remember to include ministry opportunities for members of our Wisdom Generation. For example, a retired math teacher might enjoy the opportunity to tutor parish students, retired tradesmen might lend their skill to building repair/upkeep and a veteran could make a wonderful “career day” or history class speaker.*
**Ministry job descriptions**

Most volunteer management systems call for creating job descriptions, and with good reason. A well written job description not only provides information about “what” and “when”. It also gives information on the important question of “how” by establishing clear expectations for doing the job at hand.

In addition to the information shared in the ministry guide, a job description might include:

- job duties (provided in more detail than the ministry guide might allow).
- accountability (Who do I report to? Who do I go to with questions?).
- resources available to the volunteer minister in this position.
- goal of the overall activity/event/ministry.

Job descriptions are a valuable help to new ministers, and provide a good measure for ministry leaders as they lead their teams.

**MAKING THE INVITATION**

Every parish should conduct an annual renewal of Talent which gives parishioners the opportunity to recommit to the ministries in which they are currently participating, and/or to join in new ministries. In addition, and especially if a parish is just beginning its stewardship journey, a variety of recruitment methods may be necessary to engage increasing numbers of parishioners in ministry participation.

**Responding to the Annual Renewal of Talent**

The ministry guide is complete. The response to commitment Sunday was more than everyone hoped for. Parishioners are interested and excited to offer their time in service, they have completed the reply form and they wait to be contacted so that they can actively participate. What happens next can make – or break – an effective renewal of talent.
Without timely follow-up, an effort to engage more parishioners in ministry will fall flat. Developing a contact process can be challenging, but it will be well worth the effort. In some parishes, a sub-committee of the Stewardship Committee is responsible for portions of the follow-up effort. Some parishes have a volunteer coordinator on staff and others partner with individual ministry leaders to accomplish timely follow-up.

Points to consider when developing a follow-up process:

• It is important that all committee/ministry leaders see the importance of timely follow-up. Parishioners who step forward, then never receive a call, are getting the message that their talents are not needed or valued.

• A database that contains ministry volunteer names and information is an invaluable tool. Multiple lists of names “owned” by different ministry leaders make volunteer ministry difficult and contribute to “kingdom” mentality.

• Develop a realistic timeline for contacting interested parishioners and assign contact responsibilities that are manageable.

• Develop multiple ways for ministry leaders to contact parishioners; by phone, with a confirmation postcard and phone follow-up, etc.

• Assure parishioners, through the bulletin and other broad spectrum communications, that the parish is grateful for their willingness to serve, and that they will be contacted.

Additional recruiting techniques include open invitations (pulpit, bulletin and newsletter announcements, etc.), one-on-one contacts, and letters of invitation.
• “Open” invitations
Parishes often list ministry needs in the bulletin, and are disappointed with the lack of response. Bulletin notices, newsletter articles and pulpit announcements can be effective recruiting methods if ministry leaders keep these key points in mind:

• Research shows that people need to see and/or hear a message many times before it penetrates their consciousness. One bulletin or pulpit announcement reaches approximately 23% of parishioners one time. It may take several weeks of repeating the message before parishioners take notice.

• Use all print and other communication avenues to distribute the invitation (kid-mail packets in school or Christian Formation, parish website, etc.)

• Be creative. Announcements and invitations to ministry need to be inviting, interesting and engaging. Helping to produce intriguing announcements is a great opportunity to engage a parishioner with marketing or writing skills.

• Be honest. An invitation should be engaging, but it must also be accurate. Don’t underestimate or soft-peddle time requirements or other details just to get someone interested.

• One-on-One Contacts
A personal invitation is always the most powerful. While it is not possible to issue every invitation to participate one-on-one, this method is particularly effective when filling committee member and leadership needs. When making a personal contact, remember to:

• Be truly personal. Try to name a specific trait or talent that makes the individual a “good fit” for the position.

• Share the positive impact that the parishioner can have in this ministry role.

• Be clear on the expectations and duties involved.

• Be sensitive. Be willing to take “no” for answer and resist the temptation to apply pressure.

• In all circumstances, thank the parishioner for considering the invitation.
• **Letters of Invitation**
Some parishes, especially those that conduct extensive gifts discernment processes, use letters of invitation to match a parishioner’s talents with a specific ministry opportunity. These letters draw on information provided by the individual parishioner in his/her personal gifts discernment process.

Letters can be signed by the pastor, or individual ministry leaders, and are followed-up with phone or personal contact.

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**CREATIVE MINISTRY FAIRS**
Successful stewardship parishes are finding new and creative ways to revitalize and “change up” the traditional ministry fair. By positioning the event as a celebration of all parish ministries, and incorporating interactive, educational and family-friendly elements, a ministry fair can be an effective recruiting and community building tool.

Creative Ministry Fair Ideas and Elements:

• Hold the fair a week or two before talent commitment weekend. Send out postcard invitations to all parishioners.

• Hold the event as a dinner on Friday or Sunday evening; one parish named their event “Wine, Dine and Sign”, providing a complimentary fish fry and a dessert at every ministry booth.

• Provide activities for children; coloring corner, story-telling, children's ministry booth with simple games, etc.

• Highlight selected ministries; at one event, members of the choir were strolling singers.

• Add a continuing education “twist”. One parish asked each ministry to come up with something they could teach or demonstrate at their booths. The Communication & Technology Committee demonstrated how to design a newsletter, Human Concerns showed a video of their most recent mission trip, and the parish bakers shared one of their “secret” recipes.
“Just for the Health of It” was the theme of a ministry fair that incorporated the theme of “stewardship of taking care of ourselves so we may better serve others.” Health fair elements were mixed with ministry information; a healthy cooking bake-off and grill-off, etc.

- Hold the Ministry Fair every 2 or 3 years as a special event.

**WHAT DOESN’T WORK**

There are messages that are sometimes used to “recruit” volunteer ministers that are actually counterproductive. Even though there may be some initial response, commitments gained through negative messaging will not last, and can damage efforts to engage parishioners over the long term.

- Don’t use “guilt trips”. “If you really loved the parish, you’d step forward.” This unspoken undercurrent can be viewed as manipulative. Those who respond from guilt are not really motivated to serve and often drift away from their promises of commitment.

- Don’t exert pressure. Strong-arming people into a commitment is disrespectful of the individual, and is counter to stewardship messaging in every way.

- Don’t beg. Looking pathetic does not inspire or encourage involvement.

- Don’t make demands. “Mandatory volunteerism” is a true oxymoron! For example, requiring a certain number of volunteer hours to qualify for a benefit of some kind runs counter to gifts-based ministry.

“Being part of the church means a lot more than just attending service on Sunday morning, tossing a few coins in the basket, and shaking the pastor’s hand on the way out. Being part of the church involves an interactive relationship between people with Christ as their common bond. With that definition in mind...get involved.”

*God Is In The Small Stuff - And It All Matters*  
Bruce Bickle & Stan Jantz
We are often so concerned about just getting enough new parishioners involved that retaining those already engaged in ministry is not on our radar. Constant turnover without retention, however, just keeps us running in place. We can't grow the ranks of involved parishioners if people stop participating at the same rate we gain “new recruits.” Good retention techniques help parishioners have positive and fulfilling ministry experiences. They remain actively engaged and often increase their participation. When happy ministers share their positive experiences with others, more individuals step forward and the circle of ministry grows.

Councils and committees are structured with term limits that dictate the inclusion of new members at designated intervals. How can we encourage those leaving at the end of a term to remain active in service by sharing their talents with a new ministry? We all know people who have shared their talents with one or two ministries for many years. Many more people, however, participate for a time, then leave a ministry deliberately – or just drift away.

Some retention techniques are very simple – like saying “thank you” often. Others require more effort – like offering orientation and training. As with other parts of a stewardship effort, you can begin your retention plan slowly, and build on it as hands and resources allow. Do know that everything you do to retain a volunteer minister will benefit the individual and the parish, and it will make recruiting additional parishioners easier over time.

**SIMPLE STEPS**

Some of the simple steps ministry leaders can take to help retain volunteer ministers include:

- Starting out right; acknowledge new individuals as soon as they sign-up and welcome them to your ministry/activity/event team.

- Integrate new participants into the “heart” of the ministry. Everyone has a job to do, but don’t relegate the new people only to the “grunt” work. If we keep new people on the fringe with only the “veterans” getting the interesting work, we run the risk of losing those who are fresh and eager.
• Introduce the new people to the whole team and encourage ongoing interaction. New members can be intimidated at the thought of breaking into a clique.

• Expect questions, and be ready and willing to answer them.

• Listen to input and suggestions. All ideas have value and are worth discussion.

• Say “thank you” often.

COACHING, SUPPORT AND TRAINING

Successful stewardship parishes, with ever-growing numbers of parishioners participating in ministries of all kinds, offer coaching, support and training for many of their volunteer minister positions. In some parishes the volunteer coordinator facilitates training, and in many parishes the ministry leaders take on this responsibility. Training clarifies expectations, roles and processes for working as a team and ensures that new volunteer ministers feel comfortable in their roles. Providing a process of coaching and support demonstrates the parish’s commitment to its volunteer ministers.

Training and support will vary by ministry, but should include elements designed to help volunteer ministers succeed and provide opportunities for ministers to grow in their faith such as:

• Scheduling orientation and training sessions and personally inviting each participant to attend.

• Matching long-time team members with new participants. Establishing “mentor” relationships in ministry also builds friendships and community.

• Providing the resources and information needed to do the job right.

• Offering avenues for input and suggestions.

• Affirming what is done right.

• Gently and constructively redirecting efforts when needed.

• Offering evenings/mornings of reflection – and not just for liturgical ministers.

• Highlighting leadership development opportunities.
“Thanks is easy to say,” said Piglet.
“Yes,” agreed Pooh. “But it’s hard to say enough.”

Winnie the Pooh
A. A. Milne

A parish stewardship initiative is all about building a culture of gratitude to our God for the gifts and talents He has bestowed on us. It is a natural extension of that culture to offer our gratitude to our volunteer ministers. Recognizing the host of talents they share and giving them our thanks assures our ministers that their contributions to parish life are valued. There are many ways and many opportunities to thank the parishioners who share their talents.

A parish can recognize, affirm and thank volunteer ministers by:

• Sending a thank you note or postcard from the pastor when an individual signs-up for a volunteer ministry.
• Conducting a commissioning of new volunteer ministers during weekend Mass.
• Incorporating a prayer for all volunteer ministers into liturgy at designated times of the year (spring and fall, quarterly, etc.).
• Thanking groups or individuals for their service to the parish and/or the greater community in the bulletin and parish newsletter.
• Holding an annual ministry appreciation event.
Ministry leaders can recognize, affirm and thank volunteer ministers by:

- Acknowledging new volunteer ministers as soon as possible after they step forward.
- Welcoming the new team member with enthusiasm and joy.
- Sincerely expressing appreciation for the parishioner’s service to their ministry – on a regular basis.
- Affirming the positive impact on the “big picture” the volunteer minister is having on this ministry, the parish, the community.
- Sending a thank you card to the volunteer minister’s family for sharing the gift of their family member.

Saying “thank you” to workers in the vineyard is nothing new. We have many examples of gratitude expressed in scripture, including St. Paul’s words in his letter to the Phillipians:

“I give thanks to my God at every remembrance of you, praying always with joy in my every prayer for all of you, because of your partnership for the gospel from the first day until now. I am confident of this, that the one who began a good work in you will continue to complete it until the day of Christ Jesus.”

Philippians 1:3-6
As faithful stewards, we are always examining our current sense of calling, identifying where we are feeling good about our ministry service, and considering what may need improvement or change. Even for the most dedicated volunteer minister, the time will come when he or she wants to step away to a new ministry, or seek a break from parish service. When the time comes for an individual to move on, many parishes find value in conducting an exit interview.

Exit interviews honor the value of ministry and those engaged in it. When used with parishioners, the exit interview facilitates personal growth and helps to ensure the on-going improvement of ministries and ministry processes.

An exit interview can provide further insight into the parishioner’s talents and passions. It can be used to learn about the person’s ministry experience; its challenges and rewards, and can surface recommendations to be passed on to parish leadership. The interview is also a way to affirm the parishioner’s service and to show appreciation for gifts and talents shared.

Interviews can be conducted by the volunteer coordinator or individual ministry/activity leader. In some parishes, a “talent team” sub-committee of the Stewardship Committee conducts the exit interviews which are recommended to occur not longer than 2 months after a parishioner announces that he or she is leaving a ministry.
Sample exit interview questions:

• Describe your experience with the committee/program/ministry in which you served.

• What were the most satisfying aspects of your experience?

• What were the challenges you faced when you joined this ministry?

• Were adequate resources available? If not, what was missing?

• In retrospect, what additional support or training would have been helpful?

• What suggestions do you have for the future of this ministry?

• What do you envision as some of the next steps for you in sharing your talents in ministry?

• Are there any ways I (the interviewer) or the parish can be helpful during this transition?

Information to share with the parishioner during the exit interview:

• Detail your observations and affirmations of the volunteer minister’s gifts and contributions to the richness of this ministry and the parish community.

• Describe growth and changes you have observed in the way the parishioner carries out his or her ministry.

• Note opportunities to explore in the future.

• Support the parishioner’s wish for “sabbatical” time, if it seems appropriate.

• Indicate your interest in the parishioner’s feedback and suggestions to improve the ministry or program.

• Offer your sincere “Thank You!”
Unwrapping Our Most Precious Gifts

“In the lives of disciples, something else must come before the practice of stewardship. They need a flash of insight – a certain way of seeing – by which they view the world and their relationship to it in a fresh, new light…. Not only in material creation do people discern God present and active, but also, and especially, in the human heart.”

Stewardship: A Disciple’s Response
U.S. Bishops’ Pastoral Letter

Time; each and every breath we take, gifted to us by our generous God in a measure known only to Him. Talent; the special combination of skills, abilities and aptitudes entrusted to each individual in unique combination, according to God’s plan. These are our most precious gifts.

Through a stewardship renewal of Time, we are given the opportunity and encouragement to slow down; to take time to pray, to read, to think and to learn about our faith. God is always there, waiting to engage in a living, active relationship with us.

“Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, [then] I will enter his house and dine with him, and he with me.”

Revelation 3:20

Through stewardship renewal of Talent, we discover all of our special gifts. Some are easily apparent, others lie hidden in our hearts waiting to be discovered. By committing to active participation in ministry and service, we unwrap these gifts to share them fully and freely as God intended helping our parish communities grow into vibrant Stewardship Parishes.
If not us, Who?

If not here, Where?

If not now, When?

If not for the Kingdom, Why?
Oh Lord, giver of life and source of our freedom,
We are reminded by the Psalmist that Yours is “the earth and its fullness; the world and those who dwell in it.”
We know that it is from Your hand that we have received all we have and are and will be.
Gracious and loving God,
We understand that You call us to be the Stewards of Your abundance, the caretakers of all You have entrusted to us.
Help us always to use Your gifts wisely and teach us to share them generously.
May our faithful stewardship bear witness to the love of Christ in our lives.
We pray with grateful hearts, in Jesus’ name.

Amen.
Stewardship is a Way of Life!
Calling Workers into the Vineyard

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