

# A Year Round Stewardship Planning Matrix: An Holistic Approach to Being the Church

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In the church the word stewardship too often only is associated with the annual event of the fall pledge drive. But stewardship is the care of something that has been entrusted to the steward by another. God hopes and desires that this will be a joyful experience for us filled with wonder. In the first Article of the Nicene Creed we say, "We believe in one God, the Father, the Almighty, maker of heaven and earth, of everything that is, seen and unseen". So, it is through our baptism and deeper journey in Christ we find that responsible stewardship is not really about money, but it is about fulfilling Christ's mission and ministry in the world through the right use of *all* God's blessings entrusted to us. Stewardship is not a choice; it permeates everything we do. The choice is whether or not we will be good stewards or poor stewards of God's blessings and therefore, of the Gospel. So, this Planning Matrix helps us to expand our view of stewardship to more than the annual pledge event and to integrate it into all that we are and do in the wonderful daily life of the Church.

The Matrix is designed to set a framework for practicing year round stewardship formation and programs in the context of the Church's mission for God's kingdom proclamation. The Matrix is based on the Church Year and seeks to focus themes around the Church Season and/or Cultural Seasons. These foci offer a deep richness in norms that are already present in the life of the congregation and build upon them, bolstering the effectiveness of the communication of the Stewardship message.

The Matrix contains seven recurring categories: Spirituality, Ministry Focus, Finance, Outreach, Environment, Gratitude and an Event with a Stewardship Focus. The Matrix is then organized with an action plan framework in columns which includes an Activity, Resources Available, Ministries to be involved, and a Publicity Plan for each of the Categories of Stewardship each month. It is designed to assist in the comprehensive execution of Stewardship Formation across the gamut of the congregation.

To get started with the Matrix in your congregation you should begin with an **existing list of all the ministries** that are active in your congregation. From this list you can begin to see how your congregation is already involved in ministries that would fill out the Matrix. The main need is to set them in the context of stewardship and to treat them as such with acknowledgment of the good stewardship of time, abilities, financial and material resources it takes to execute these ministries. In short, it is helping us to see our ministries from the perspective of practicing and celebrating good stewardship of the ministries and resources we have for the Gospel mission we have been given in our particular context.

To this purpose, the Matrix is organized in a spreadsheet format to allow for customization by the end-user. Tailoring a resource to fit the needs and resources of a particular congregation are the intent. It is designed to be accessible to large and small congregations and anything in between. Some parishes may chose to do 3-4 categories each month, but the Gratitude Component should always be executed monthly. If all categories are not utilized each month, a rotation equally distributing the components should be used throughout the year.

Please note, the MATRIX follows this detailed description and a full SAMPLE MATRIX with the Activity column filled-in is offered, too, for an example. The SAMPLE MATRIX is helpful to view as the description is read.

## **CATEGORIES**

**Spirituality:** A focus on the stewardship and cultivation of our spiritual life communicates the deep connection between faithful stewardship and a healthy spiritual life. Stewardship is a spiritual issue; and keeping Sabbath

is a key element in understanding God's abundance. This category offers ways to deepen the spiritual lives of individuals and the congregation, building on the theme of the month. Some examples are a class on spiritual disciplines or information about praying the labyrinth.

**Ministry Focus:** The mission of a congregation is largely carried out through its ministries. The ministry spotlighted gives an opportunity to teach stewardship related to that ministry. Focusing on a different ministry each month is a way of raising awareness about it to attract new participants (the time and talent part of stewardship). Ways to do this include commissioning ministry members during a church service, highlighting a different ministry in the church newsletter each edition, or inviting the ministry head to say a few words about the ministry during the announcements segment of worship. This also provides a wonderful opportunity for the parish to be publicly thanked for their financial support of the Spotlight Ministry.

**Finance:** This category offers a particular opportunity for an appeal, focus on fiscal responsibility, or financial ministry offering. Some of these activities can be used to communicate the congregational leadership's good stewardship of the congregation's material resources and the physical plant. Activities in the financial component should not be limited to congregational finances; there also are many ways families can be intentional about how they manage their money including what they are saving and what percentage of their income they are giving away.

**Environment:** A steward is a person to whom something is entrusted, and how we care for the environment that God has entrusted to us is a mark of our faithfulness. This category can include caring for the environment in our communities, in our homes, and in our churches. Activities that show care for the environment are especially attractive to children and families. This category is an imperative element of any stewardship formation, especially with those parishioners born after 1960. Asking for a pledge from many young adults while the church is using Styrofoam cups is often offensive to them because they see us not practicing what we preach. A few examples for this component include Reduce/Reuse/Recycle programs, Earth Sunday Celebrations, Stray Pet Programs, and a St. Francis' Day Blessing of the Animals. Simply put, our responsible Environmental/Creation Stewardship conveys loving your neighbor as yourself and loving God with all that we are. Remember, the earth is the Lord's and everything in it (*Ps. 24. 1*).

**Outreach:** In outreach we take our stewardship to the streets of our communities. This category gives us an opportunity to live out our Stewardship teaching in the flesh. The idea is to have a missional focus on those outside the parish who are in need. The majority of these should be hands on ministries and not merely "check-writing" ministries. These activities help people connect their pledge to ministry; in addition, communicating and celebrating the stories of meeting the needs of people are important motivators for personal stewardship decisions. It is where the Gospel rubber hits the road! The members involved in actually reaching out will have the most powerful stories of transformation. Their public sharing of these stories are great opportunities for the whole congregation to give thanks (and be thanked by the leadership) for their good stewardship in support of ministries like these!

**Gratitude:** This category simply focuses on a Ministry group that is to be thanked for their ministry in a tangible way. This might be an annual dinner, hand-written cards, a commissioning, or some other way of saying thanks other than a verbal thanks passing in the hall or after one of their programs. We are Eucharistic communities, saying thanks in concrete ways exemplifies the gratitude we have in our hearts for God's blessings received through their work and helps them to understand that their work is sacramental, too. We don't do this enough and it really makes an huge difference in our community's common life.

**Event with a Stewardship Focus:** This category is a specific Stewardship Ministry event like running the Share Save Spend program for the parishioners or the Halloween Candy Tithe with the candy proceeds going to a community children’s crisis center. It may also be distributing a resource like a Lenten Reflection Booklet – online for an even stronger Stewardship message but printed, for those without online access. Celebrating Earth Sunday with some planned reduce/reuse/ recycle programs are a great way to teach and celebrate our care for the earth and all that is in it. A Parish Workday is also a great opportunity for a *stewardship* event when we utilize it as a teaching moment to talk about being stewards of all we have for Christ's mission. This also is a great example of something your congregation is already doing that can be plugged into the Matrix but re-framed into a Stewardship teaching opportunity.

## **ACTION PLAN COLUMNS**

**The Activities Column** lists either a specific activity or a general activity for each category on a monthly basis. The other columns organize the related resources, ministries and publicity needed to execute the categories’ programs each month.

**The Resources Column** offers a place to list the resources available for each specific category’s activity every month. These resources include any people or programs available to assist in the execution of the activity. This is a great place to brainstorm and involve those outside the Stewardship Ministry Team.

**The Ministries Column** simply is a place to list the different ministry groups that are involved in coordinating the specific activity of the month for that category. Be creative here and don’t limit it to the “usual suspects”.

**The Publicity Column** gives an opportunity to list the ways the activity will be promoted in the congregation and community. This includes the weekly announcements/bulletin, newsletter, email blast, mailed invitations, local newspapers, and many other ways to promote an event. Don’t forget to list the Ministries and Resources available to carry out this vital communication piece.