

Inspiration from ICSC – Notes from Sharon Ehrenkranz

STEWARDSHIP: A JOURNEY OF HOPE – September 21-24, 2025 – Chicago

WHAT I ATTENDED:

- 1) Opening Plenary Session – *Archbishop Shelton Fabre (Episcopal Moderator for ICSC)*
- 2) Stewards of God’s Grace: An Introduction to Christian Stewardship – *Leisa Anslinger*
- 3) From Pew to Purpose: How Stewardship Helps Reengage Parishioners on the Sidelines – *Quentin Schesnuik*
- 4) What is the Bishop’s Pastoral Letter on Stewardship Telling Us Today? – *Fr. Joe Creedon*
- 5) Stewardship & the Liturgy – *Fr. James Misko*
- 6) Pilgrims of Hope: Growing Young Adult Stewards Today – *Matt Kresich*
- 7) Shepherding a Stewardship Parish: Tips for Raising Stewardship Awareness in Your Flock – *Fr. Bob Kantor*
- 8) The Benefits of Establishing Small Groups to the Life of Your Parish – *Fr. Michael White & Tom Corcoran*
- 9) The Call: Inviting, Forming & Equipping Stewardship Leaders – *(My presentation)*
- 10) Regions 10/13 Meeting – *Facilitated by Michael Schillaci*

MY FAVORITE TAKEAWAYS AT-A-GLANCE:

- **Archbishop Joe Vásquez** is part of a new ICSC Bishops Advisory Group, responsible for supporting ICSC, encouraging conference attendance and spirituality of stewardship
- **Fr. James Misko** (Diocese of Austin) is a great fit as a possible speaker at our parish, with Fr. Reginald’s focus on the liturgy
- **Free resources from Leisa Anslinger** (like reflections, workshops): gratefuldisciples.net
- **Free resources** (like a Time & Talent Campaign Kit and video shorts) from Office of Parish Vitality & Stewardship: archtoronto.org/stewardship
- **Connect seminarians to parish** by inviting them to write a stewardship message for the bulletin on that Sunday’s gospel
- **Orans position** – Father isn’t holding up the roof by himself. God is. Jesus was crucified in this position, with His heart exposed, obedient and letting go
- **Freedom to give** – “Am I free enough to give freely?” Most important gift God gives us; He never forces us to come to Him; with open arms we can freely receive & give (orans)
- **Offertory envelopes:** printed with space for family to write how they will serve/give
- **Encourage leadership in young people** – HS seniors do the altar serving training
- **Good question to begin evangelization:** “What is your first memory of faith?”
- **Effective formula for sharing stewardship message:** I used to think stewardship meant... , and then, this happened to me... , and now, my life is changed...

FROM MY NOTES:

(Unfortunately, the sessions were not recorded this year)

Archbishop Shelton Fabre (Opening Plenary Session)

- Stewardship for ALL CREATION begins with our own bodies, then extends beyond ourselves to the world around us
- Nothing that exists is here by accident; we must affirm the sacredness of all human life
- Pope Leo XIV gave an apostolic blessing for the ICSC Conference
- Archbishop Shelton is the Episcopal Moderator for ICSC; he created an ICSC Bishops Advisory Group; Archbishop Joe Vasquez is one of six bishops who serve on it, to:
 - 1) teach & promote the spirituality of stewardship
 - 2) encourage seminaries, schools & parishes to teach stewardship principles
 - 3) advise the ICSC Board of Directors
 - 4) encourage attendance at the ICSC annual conference
 - 5) advocate for the mission of ICSC and help to carry out its programs

Leisa Anslinger (An Introduction to Christian Stewardship)

- Stewardship is an expression of discipleship
- A steward is called to care for, nurture and yield with increase
- Stewards cooperate with the Creator in continuing the divine work
- St. Ignatius: “Semper maior” (always greater), meaning *deeper*, not more activity
- St. Eliz Ann Seton: “Be prepared to meet your grace in the daily circumstances of life.”
- Effective formula for sharing a stewardship message:
 - 1) I used to think that stewardship meant...
 - 2) And then, this happened to me...
 - 3) And now, my life has changed...
- Conversion is about change – we are never finished
- Sacrifice is the blueprint on which our lives are built
- Eucharistic stewardship = celebrate, offer, receive, go out to serve
- FREE RESOURCE: disciplesradiatechrist.org
- FREE RESOURCE: gratefuldisciples.net

Quentin Schesnuik (How Stewardship Helps Reengage Parishioners on the Sidelines)

- The Gift of Self – Betty Crocker cake-in-a-box failed at first because you only had to add water; they discovered women wanted to put something of themselves into the cake, so they changed formulation so they can add an egg
- Go after those who are most engaged first
- Prices Law: In any group, half the results are produced by the square root of the total number of contributors (EX: 500 parishioners attending Mass = 22 are hyper-productive)

- Timing is key – there are certain times of the year that are better for asking/inviting (EX: Christmas is a great time for giving financially, but not necessarily for time/talent)
- November is a good time of the year (fits with Thanksgiving and gospel readings)
- Asking may be difficult for some (fear of how I look/sound, fear of rejection) – but people pick up on fear and it's not about us – it's about Jesus
- Invite seminarians to write a stewardship reflection on the gospel for the bulletin – this will be good experience for the seminarian and connect him to the parish
- FREE RESOURCES: archtoronto.org/stewardship

Fr. Joe Creedon (What is the Bishop's Pastoral Letter on Stewardship Telling Us Today?)

- Stewardship is a spirituality, not a program
 - Programs come-and-go
 - Spirituality is like a lens – it takes what is fuzzy and makes it clear
- Stewardship is already present at your parishes in every liturgy
 - People offering to serve as ushers, lectors, EMOHC, sing in the choir...
 - You might not see it at first, but it's there (like the arrow in the FedEx logo)
- Strike the word ~~VOLUNTEER~~ – volunteering is what we do with time leftover
- Mission and ministry – ongoing and evolving throughout our lives
- The baptized are not “Father's helpers” - every baptized person has a mission & ministry
- We don't give people salvation – we give them opportunities to live out their baptism
- Say grace first (wisdom from G. K. Chesterton) – before listening to music, give thanks to God for the composer, musicians, producer, technicians, marketing & distribution, all who made it possible (same thing before dashing into the supermarket for groceries)
- It takes practice – you may have a gift, but unless you practice, your gift is wasted
- Stewardship is rooted in the need of givers to give; our parishioners have a need to give.
- Three kinds of givers: 1) Grouchy Givers, 2) Duty Givers, 3) Thanks Givers
- Our whole Mass is about THANKSGIVING
- Journey: Called as disciples → (fill in your story) → Called to give

Fr. James Misko (Stewardship & the Liturgy)

- His background was in foodservice at Macaroni Grill – *same as a pastor* – turn on the lights, check the bathrooms, prepare the food, serve the food, collect money, and hope they come back next week!
- Stewardship is caring for something that is not your own
- Administration is important ministry: *ministratae* → to serve (ministry, administration)
- Stewarding ourselves – the Holy Spirit's indwelling within us
- Stewarding our homes – welcoming, clean, warm, loving
- Stewarding our parishes – from the moment they arrive to the moment they leave

- Almost everything is chosen for us by God – our job is to receive and cultivate awareness of who (and Whose) I am
- Liturgy = Work of the people; it's important to include as many people as possible
- Re-membering = participating in God's ever-creative nature
- Liturgy calls us out of ourselves into something greater than ourselves
- Orans position of Presider at Mass
 - Mass is a chance for priests to let go and get out of the way of the miracle
 - Jesus was crucified in the orans position – heart exposed, obedient, vulnerable
 - Father is not raising the roof or holding things up on his own – God is!
 - “Lord, you are not a problem to be solved, but a mystery to be encountered”
- Offertory calls for sacrifice: *Pray my brothers and sisters, that my sacrifice and yours may be acceptable to God, the almighty Father... May the Lord accept the sacrifice at your hands, for the praise and glory of his name, for our good and the good of all his holy Church.*
- Henri Nouwen: To whom does your heart belong? (Blessed are the SINGLE-HEARTED)
- Acts of the Apostles: They held all things in common (Acts 2:44)
- Sunday Offertory = living in the orans position
- God needs our help to bring His handiwork to fulfillment (Eph 2:10) – gives us a chance to help God help us
- Co-creation is very dignified – it's undignified to withhold money
- Freedom is the most important gift God gives us – He never forces us to come to Him
- It is deeply satisfying to give when we have the freedom to give
- “Am I free enough to give freely?” – withholding is the opposite of the orans position
- Distinction between cash and wealth:
 - Cash = always checking balances and status of accounts
 - Wealth = I have everything I need, I need nothing more
 - Freedom = I can go home and relax, knowing I have everything I need
- Jesus: *Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth... but store up treasures in heaven... for where your treasure is, there also will your heart be* (Matt 6:19-21).

Matt Kresich (Pilgrims of Hope: Growing Young Adult Stewards Today)

- Begin with hope – Pope Francis said that hope is not a passive virtue
- Pope Leo XIV: To share that message of hope with one another – in outreach, in service, in looking for ways to make our world a better place – gives true life to all of us, and is a sign of hope for the whole world. (6/14/25)
- View data about young adults who are “nones” through eyes of hope (Pew Aug 2023):
 - 63% believe in nothing particular (*it's not that they don't believe!*)
 - 20% are agnostic
 - 17% are atheists

- Data shows young people are hungry, seeking authentic community, looking to escape tension, and need new entry points
- The ground is fertile – they haven't given up on God, but their community didn't serve
- New findings about young adults:
 - 1) They drive to find community (parish boundaries don't matter)
 - 2) They don't necessarily register at parishes
 - 3) They don't attend weekly/regularly
 - 4) They aren't churched (their parents are the ones who stopped attending; they don't "speak the language")
- We don't need theology majors, just people willing to share their stories
- Good question to take first step in evangelization: "What is your first memory of faith?"
- Ways to invest in young people:
 - Food (really, it works)
 - No cost for weddings
 - Offer childcare
 - Make space in leadership
- This will take time – young adults may not have time now, meet them where they are
- IDEA: Offer practical workshops that teach life skills (budgeting, time mgt, parenting)
- IDEA: Offer something during Lent (they love Lent and 40 days is achievable)
- IDEA: Care For Creation is "low hanging fruit" for young people – offer something
- IDEA: Outreach – subsidiarity is at the heart of Catholic Social Teaching
- IDEA: Talent discernment can help them understand the holy calling of all vocations
- IDEA: Intentionally invite young people into parish leadership (be patient)

Fr. Bob Kantor (Shepherding a Stewardship Parish: Raising Stewardship Awareness)

- Stewardship is a never-ending mission
- Consumers versus stewards (people "shopping" for music, homilies, etc)
- It's okay if people are visiting – they'll take it back to their homes or home parish
- Delivering the stewardship message – God reaches out to us with unconditional love through His Word – parables offer lessons in giving, stewardship
- Stewardship Committee – involve all ages/cultures, couples, Pastoral Advisor, Stewardship Coordinator (Staff position responsible for time & talent, not money)
- Get to know one another: How many people in the parish do you know by name?
- IDEA: Have offertory envelopes printed with a place for families to write-in what they plan to do (time/talent) that week
- IDEA: Offer a Welcome Retreat for newcomers
- IDEA: In Advent, have a live nativity – guards can pass out census forms to complete
- IDEA: Invite high school seniors to do the Altar Server Training – early leadership

Fr. Michael White & Tom Corcoran (Benefits of Establishing Small Groups to the Life of Parish)

- NEW BOOK – The Transformative Power of Small Groups (A Rebuilt Book)
- Healthy, growing parishes share four strategic anchors:
 - 1) Create great weekend experience
 - 2) Grow wider by welcoming outsiders
 - 3) Grow deeper by establishing path for discipleship
 - 4) Builds layers of leaders
- Focus on DEEPER – establish path for discipleship thru small groups
- 7-step guide for building vibrant Catholic communities
 - 1) Know the WHY behind the WHAT
 - 2) Recognize the benefits (to the people and to the pastor/staff)
 - 3) Build your team (core team, coaches, small group leaders)
 - 4) Define the WHAT (content, commitments)
 - 5) Launch the groups (parish launch)
 - 6) Serve your groups (communication, marketing, training, ongoing support)
 - 7) Persevere (naming small-group problems, personalities, forming an annual plan)
- Benefits for Parishioners –
 - 1) Small groups help us find friends in faith
 - 2) Groups are a place to mutually encourage one another
 - 3) Groups lead to positive life change and growth
 - 4) Small groups are relationships that support other relationships
 - 5) Small groups help us carry one another's burdens
 - 6) Small groups help us believe in God when we are struggling
- Benefits for Parish Staff/Leadership –
 - 1) Efficient, effective, reliable pastoral care
 - 2) Groups build unity in the Body of Christ
 - 3) Groups make disciples
 - 4) Group members give more (2x more than others)
 - 5) Increased commitment to parish mission and vision

Combined Region 10 (Texas) and Region 13 (Colorado, Utah, New Mexico, Arizona) Meeting

- Over 30 people in attendance
- People shared their high points of the conference and what they'd like to see next year
- "The great strength we gain from attending the ICSC Conference is collaboration, not competition. ICSC exemplifies this at a very high level." – Michele Sabino
- Positive feedback for Session 76: Engaging Young People into Stewardship and Development Efforts (Sheila O'Hagan McGirl, Diocese of Wilmington)
- When asked "Are you saved?" answer, "No, I want God to SPEND me and use me up."
- Positivity – "The answer is YES. What's the question?"