

StewardCAST

A monthly e-newsletter of LCMS Stewardship Ministry

lcms.org/stewardship



More Stewardship Questions

Last month in the StewardCAST there was a recap of a wonderful presentation given by Charles Lane at the LCMS District Stewardship Leaders Conference held in Tempe, Ariz. the last weekend in February. These questions that were raised by Lane were thought-provoking and worth a deeper look for those who are called by God to be steward leaders in the local congregation and the districts of the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod. This month's StewardCAST will deal with the remainder of the stewardship questions behind the questions.

Talking Stewardship Not Shortfall

QUESTION:

Does the Congregation talk about money when it isn't asking for any?

This is powerful question! For many congregations, stewardship has been tied to the preparation of the annual budget. There is some logic in this approach. After all, if you are going to set a spending guide, you should get an idea about how much money is coming in. It isn't good stewardship to

spend more than the church receives over the course of the year. While this may seem logical, it really does put a limit on stewardship growth for both the individual and the congregation.

Part of this limitation is connected to people not being willing to give the congregation more than they perceive is needed to maintain the current ministry. This is what Lane terms: "stewardship being held hostage by the paying of the bills." How often does a congregation have a perfectly good mission and ministry opportunity presented to it, but the church thinks they

must pass on it because there isn't enough money to accomplish the task? Most often that limitation is actually not a monetary limitation, but rather a stewardship limitation. This approach conditions the congregation to think that they are the actual owners of the resources that the Lord has entrusted to them.

Understanding Limitations and Gifts

There is another limitation to stewardship that comes from only talking about money when there is a need for money. This limitation comes from introducing a scarcity mentality. If the pastor only preaches and teaches about money at budget time and budget shortfall time, this continues to foster the concept that stewardship is a negative thing that only flows from a lack of money in the congregation. This cannot be farther from the truth! Even the smallest congregations in Synod, when taught that stewardship is really about our responding to and managing the gifts of the Lord for the glory of the Lord, has enough resources to carry on the ministry God has given to it. There may need to be sacrifices, but that goes back to the counter-cultural nature of stewardship. As Christians are formed as faithful stewards, the desire for amassing possessions tends to diminish and the desire to give away from their abundance grows. This kind of growth can only happen when the congregation is afraid the wolf is at the door! Pastors and stewardship leaders need to teach and lead in such a way as to free stewardship from the slavery of paying the bills. When that freedom comes, stewardship soars!

QUESTION:

Are the people effectively asked to increase their giving every year?

The old axiom is true. The worst they can say is no. When members of a local congregation are not regularly challenged to review and grow in their personal financial stewardship, there will not be much growth at all. While it is indeed the Holy Spirit that leads individual members in the answering of the two central stewardship questions: "How has God blessed me and how is God calling me to respond?" If those questions

are not asked, there is unlikely going to be any natural increase. Human beings do not ordinarily voluntarily part with the money that they have been given by God.

Teaching Not Manipulation

This presentation of the questions should not be manipulative by the pastor or the stewardship leaders. Any ask in this area should be made from biblical and theological positions. It is disingenuous to



CONGREGATIONS THAT ARE OPEN AND HONEST about financial generosity, especially when there isn't a pressing need for money, will have a much more genuine approach.

apply high pressure or guilt in this area. The opportunity should flow from the regular reminders that the pastor gives to the members of the congregation of their baptismal identity. Human beings were created to be stewards. They failed at this task in the Garden. But our Lord, in His mercy and grace, has restored the baptized into full relationship with Him. This is not only an eternal reality! This baptismal restoration brings into full view to the Christian that they are called by God to steward what has been entrusted to them in the here and now!

This growth as a baptized child of God includes the challenge to grow in generosity. This does not need to be based on an on-going drive. As a pastor prepares sermons, especially from the lectionary, there are ample opportunities to talk about generosity. This doesn't require a homiletical fishing expedition either. A pastor that is truly doing his work of preparation can be led by the Holy Spirit to bring the concept of generosity from the text, not the perceived need of the congregation.

Allow for Generosity

Congregations that are open and honest about financial generosity, especially when there isn't a pressing need for money, will have a much more genuine approach. It removes any perception of ulterior motives from the pastor and steward leaders in the congregation. Done faithfully from the Word of God, it can also blunt to common criticism that all the pastor ever talks about is money! This regular, open and honest communication from the Scriptures will lead people and form stewards in the congregation!

QUESTION:

Are people thanked for their giving of time, talents and money?

This is one easy area that a congregation can really make an impact. As the congregation teaches sound individual stewardship as a posture of thanksgiving to God for His abundant provision and blessing, would it not also make sense for the congregation to corporately practice the same? Of course, it does! One of the easiest ways sound stewardship can be cultivated is for the pastor and leaders of the congregation to regularly say thank you to those who have given generously!

Encourage Thankfulness

The chief objection to this would be that it would make generosity a spectacle more than a response. This is a possibility because of the sinful nature that exists in every steward that the Lord has assembled in the local congregation. But being an active thanker in ministry does not always involve a public spectacle. This is not a call

StewardCAST is published monthly by:
LCMS Stewardship Ministry
1333 S. Kirkwood Road
St. Louis, MO 63122
888-THE LCMS (843-5267)
infocenter@lcms.org
lcms.org/stewardship

StewardCAST may be reprinted with acknowledgment given to The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod.

- President of the Synod:
Rev. Dr. Matthew C. Harrison
- Executive Director,
Office of National Mission:
Rev. Bart Day
- Author:
Rev. Nathan Meador
*Pastor, St. John Lutheran Church,
Plymouth, Wis.*
- Coordinator:
Robbie Clasen
- Designer:
Lisa Moeller

How to Subscribe

To subscribe to *StewardCAST*, register online at lcms.org/enews. Select *StewardCAST* from among the “Stewardship and Giving” newsletters.

Support LCMS

Global Mission Fund

Your gift to the Global Mission Fund impacts people around the world and in our own backyard through acts of Christian compassion, wherever the need is greatest at the time the gift is made. Gifts are used exclusively to support Synod’s *Witness, Mercy, Life Together* work at home and abroad.

GIVE NOW



to go back to the days when refurbished pews, stained glass windows and even hymnals were labeled with the name of the person who gave the gift. That is what creates spectacle giving which is really not stewardship at all. In fact, private thanks can go even farther than public thanks.

A pastor or stewardship leader in the congregation can do this very easily on Monday morning. If the small children’s choir sang in worship as stewards of their talents, what would it hurt to spend a half hour writing short thank you notes on Monday? It is a powerful way to encourage stewardship that only costs a stamp!

Strategic Stewardship Formation

There are other strategic ways for thanks to be applied to the formation of stewards. When people make significant gifts to the congregation, there needs to be a letter sent for tax purposes. This form letter approach is less than thankful. What would be harmed if the pastor penned a short, personalized thanksgiving note on the letter? The answer: nothing!

“... the goal of the thanks is not to make a spectacle, but to raise them up as patterns of faithful stewardship to be emulated.”

Thanking first-time givers is also a great way to encourage someone to grow in their stewardship! Most church management software programs can be set up to generate a list of first time givers almost immediately after weekly contributions are posted. If a congregation doesn’t have a church management software program, the financial secretary could simply provide the pastor with the chance to say thank you in writing.

Another powerful thanks tool is to look for opportunities to thank long-term servants of the congregation. Again, the goal of the thanks is not to make a spectacle, but to raise them up as patterns of faithful stewardship to be emulated. This again, personal investment of time, a note and a stamp can far outweigh the Sunday morning accolades during the announcements at worship.

These questions are worth the time of consideration. Their answers can serve as great and easy tools for growing the stewardship of the local congregation. Implementing them may take different shapes in the local congregation. But if attempted, they can and will bring marked results.

