

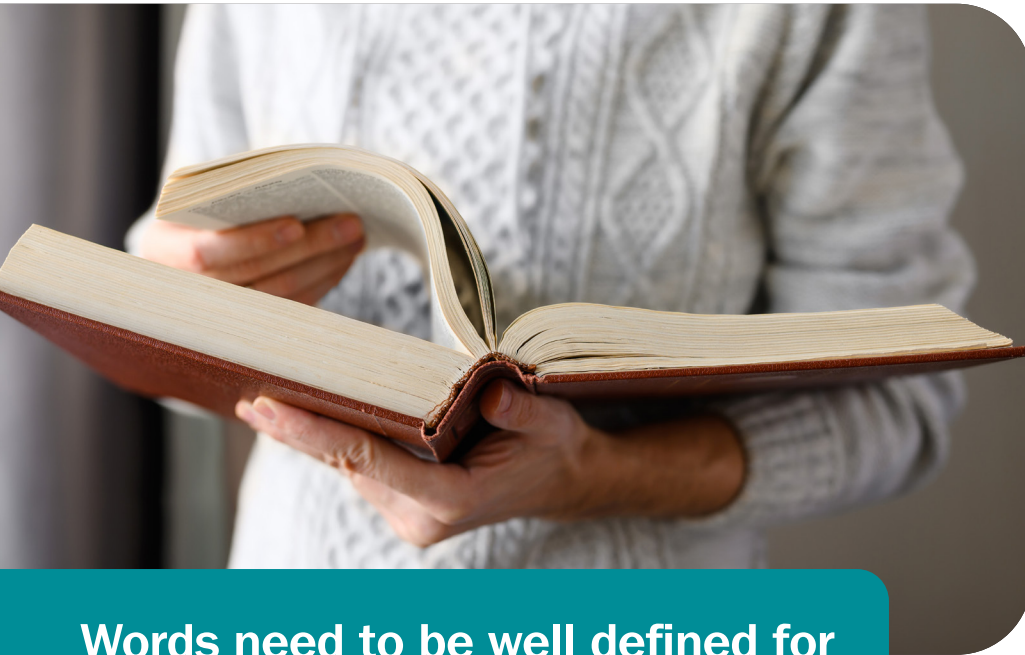
# StewardCAST

A monthly e-newsletter of LCMS Stewardship Ministry

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## Stewardship Emphasis



**Words need to be well defined for a cogent discussion to take place.**

**W**hen was the last time you actually used a dictionary? I am not talking about the last time you accessed one of the web-based sites that serve as a dictionary. When was the last time you actually held one of those books in your hands and used it for its intended purpose? For me, it has been a long time. I don't think I have used a dictionary in its totality since I was being taught how to use it in elementary school.

The vast majority of us view the dictionary as a book that provides definitions for words and phrases. This is very important for communication. Words need to be well defined for a cogent discussion to take place. How often have we been involved in a discussion with someone in person or online who is clearly using a word in a way that is not in line with its proper meaning? It renders the conversation pointless because it is not based on the solid foundation of a shared definition.

But a dictionary has even more than definitions. It also gives instruction on how words are to be pronounced. In fact, when you look up a word in the dictionary, the entry does not start with the definition. It starts with a pronunciation key! It shows how the word should sound and how it should be properly accented. With so much of our conversation being spoken, correct pronunciation of a word is also critical for communication. Mispronounced words can lead to miscommunication of ideas at best and confusion, frustration and even harm at worst. If we AC-cent the wrong SYL-lable, we can run into difficulties.

### Defining stewardship rightly

The same thing happens in stewardship. We are deep in the time of the year when congregations and ministries are carrying out their annual "stewardship emphasis." This task is absolutely essential for congregations to carry out. As has been noted in previous editions of *StewardCAST*, stewardship must be taught. Faithful stewardship flies in the face of a fallen human nature. Created in the image of God, the steward is to reflect the will of the Creator within creation by the way he stewards what the Lord has made for His glory and the benefit of the neighbor. This free and joyous activity of the child of God, and God's family the church, is to be carried out for God's purposes. But so often our stewardship is marred by wanting *our* will to be done. So when a congregation embarks

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 LCMS Stewardship Ministry  
 1333 S. Kirkwood Road  
 St. Louis, MO 63122  
 888-THE LCMS (843-5267)  
[infocenter@lcms.org](mailto:infocenter@lcms.org)  
[lcms.org/stewardship](https://lcms.org/stewardship)

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#### STAFF

- Rev. Heath Curtis  
*Coordinator (contracted),  
LCMS Stewardship Ministry*
- Rev. Dr. Nathan Meador  
*Assistant Coordinator (contracted),  
LCMS Stewardship Ministry; Executive  
Assistant to the President for Mission  
and Mercy, LCMS South Wisconsin  
District; and Official Lutheran Pastor  
of the B93 Morning Show*
- Robbie Clasen  
*Administrative Assistant,  
LCMS Stewardship Ministry*

#### CONTRIBUTOR

- Lisa Moeller, *Designer*

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on their annual stewardship emphasis, they are really communicating an important definition.

However, steward leaders can run the risk of putting the EM-phasis on the wrong SYL-lable! This happens when the teaching of stewardship is tied to the activity of the steward rather than their identity. This misplaced EM-phasis can lead to despair, manipulation or even self-righteousness. When a stewardship emphasis is based on human effort, the hearers are shamed and the leaders are tempted to manipulate. We have all heard well-meaning steward leaders talk about sacrifice. “If we would all give up one Starbucks run and put that in the plate, everything would be fine.” Or “if we all just gave five dollars more each week we would have more than enough money for ministry.” This is manipulation. It also runs the risk of crushing the souls of those who know they have been less than faithful stewards over the years and are seeking in repentant faith to get it back in line, but don’t have the extra fiver at the moment. On the other end, there is the self-righteousness of “Well I have been doing my part! I tithe!” Or there is the age-old stewardship Ponzi scheme approach that says, “I give to God with a spoon and God blesses me with a scoop shovel!” Do you remember seeing those old lapel pins?

### A biblical and confessional stewardship emphasis

But these approaches are not at all in line with the Scripture. When steward leaders carry out a biblical and confessional stewardship emphasis, it points the steward not to what they do but to who they are! Stewards steward because that is what they

have been given to do. This is the emphasis that we need to put in place. Steward leaders are in place to simply lead those under their care to be who they are made to be. When they fail in this stewardship, they are pointed to the Great Steward, Jesus Christ, who was for them once and for all what they could never be, at the cross and empty tomb. This treasure delivered at font, altar and pulpit is what the steward is given to steward

in the world. This Gospel becomes the only treasure that the Christian steward has. Everything that stewardship has emphasized in the past — time, talents, treasures, etc. — are really not stewardship. They are the means by which we steward the Gospel to those around us. The Gospel of Jesus is the will of God that we are to reflect to the world that is full of death and darkness.

Any emphasis that doesn’t start with Christ and flow back to Christ working in and through the steward is one that is guilty of EM-phasis on the wrong SYL-lable! If we are honest, only hitting on the EM-phasis once a year

isn’t sufficient. This is a year-round effort. Pointing people to the use of good First Article gifts for the sake of the Gospel and it reaching the neighbor is an emphasis that is needed every week. Doing this, every week becomes a stewardship Sunday. Every lectionary text is a stewardship text. Every baptismal remembrance is a stewardship event. Every steward kneeling at the rail to receive Christ is a stewardship event.

With the proper Gospel emphasis, stewardship is nothing to be feared. With proper Gospel emphasis, it can’t be relegated to once a year, either. When stewardship is properly defined and accented, the message is one that sets stewards up to be all that they have been created and redeemed to be.



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