

Stewardship

IN AND THROUGH WORSHIP

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Introduction

Psalm 96 captures a significant element of corporate worship that is often overlooked — the centrality of our offerings. Read verses 7–9 of this psalm with stewardship eyes:

*Ascribe to the LORD, O families of the peoples;
ascribe to the LORD glory and strength!
Ascribe to the LORD the glory due his name;
bring an offering, and come into his courts!
Worship the LORD in the splendor of holiness;
tremble before him, all the earth.*

Notice the parallelism, which is so characteristic of Hebrew poetry, and the way these verses build intensity toward their main theo-centric focus. It's all about worshiping God in a specific locality, which includes an appropriately responsive activity by the participants. When words are no longer adequate (we cannot glorify God's name adequately, since it is the unspeakable name), our actions must take over. We worship God not only with our whole lives, but specifically with our offerings brought into His house. Interestingly, verse 8 is part of the Gradual for the Epiphany season in our three-year lectionary series.

This booklet is designed for congregations to use throughout the year as an ongoing encouragement to keep stewardship central in the congregation's worship life. There is undoubtedly no greater opportunity afforded to congregations for such a venue for stewardship education throughout the year at a corporate level than on Sundays. Guided by the Spirit and motivated by gratitude, pastors will benefit from the suggestions offered here as well as the opportunity to expand and develop your own specific ways to enhance the stewardship life in your local settings.

There are three central goals for the material in this pamphlet:

1. To note the *centrality* of biblical *stewardship* in corporate worship;
2. To discover how we can encourage stewardship at weekly worship; and
3. To re-examine why we need to teach the elements of stewardship to members and guests

What is Lutheran Worship?

Let's begin with a general understanding of worship. Many Christians define worship as giving God glory, which is a good start. Yet Lutherans have had a unique perspective. For Lutherans, worship is multidimensional with at least four elements or directions of attention. Biblical worship always starts with God, who comes to us through Word and Sacraments. This encounter with God is the basis for our stewardship as well as our regular worship. As a result of encountering God every week, we are moved to respond with psalms, hymns and spiritual songs, and with prayers and praises and gifts of gratitude. This expression of our baptismal faith is where corporate and communal activities are most readily observed and why this dimension is often the major understanding of worship among Christians. This also is the dimension where stewardship themes will play a dominant role. A third aspect of worship provides an opportunity to nurture the faith that God's Spirit has created. Education was one of the major reasons Martin Luther emphasized reform of the liturgy and the necessity of preaching, as Vilmos Vajta's book, *Luther on Worship*, so clearly and thoroughly demonstrated in the last century. Luther also saw worship, especially through the liturgy, as an opportunity to nurture the young — both in age and in faith — through divine communication and education so that all people could be “taught by God” (*theodidacti*). The fourth objective of worship is that it empowers us to give witness to our faith in God throughout the week. What happens on Sunday moves us to serve the Lord throughout the week and provides motivation for us to express our faith in Him to others by word and deed. This is why only believers can truly worship, since they alone have faith in God.

Stewardship in our Liturgy

What we do in worship is a Gospel-motivated, Spirit-directed response to what God the Father has done for us in His Son, Jesus Christ. That is why we have often heard the double emphasis: “What we believe affects our worship. How we worship affects our beliefs.” There is an intimate connection between our doctrine (faithful teaching) and our doxology (faith-filled praise). Our expressions in response to what God has done are at the heart of our congregation's stewardship awareness. We give because He first gave to us. In a moment, we will go through a typical liturgy from the Divine Service to see the specific stewardship emphasis.

In the meantime, it might be helpful to write down or discuss the following:

Can you give an illustration from your own congregation's experience of the idea that worship and doctrine have a mutual influence on each other? How might that be observed? What doctrines are emphasized? What worship activities are key?

Stewards in Our Liturgy

THE CONFESSION OF SINS

The Divine Service (in all the settings of *Lutheran Service Book*) begins with the confession of sins. Here we come to God after invoking His presence and recalling our Baptism, recognizing our need as well as His gracious forgiveness in and through Christ's meritorious death and resurrection. Already at this point, there is an element of stewardship — an expression of how we conduct our lives as a community who have been born of water and the Spirit, yet who have not always lived in that light. We now confess that we have sinned “in thought, word, and *deed*” (emphasis added). Our actions betray our sinful, self-centered and frequently self-serving condition. We continue by admitting our estranged state of sinfulness “by what we *have done* and by what we *have left undone*.” Traditionally, we categorize these as sins of commission and omission. How we spend our time and our money certainly comes to mind at this point.

Stewardship falls under the First Commandment. Do we make money our god? What sins of materialism have we committed? Are we dominated by selfish preoccupations? How have we used the time that God has provided equally for us all each week? Have we demonstrated our responsibilities as stewards and caretakers of God's creation?

Then comes the glorious announcement of forgiveness in Holy Absolution or the declaration of grace. Forgiven, we are empowered to give back to God in gratitude for the new life we have in Christ. A stewardship theme continues in the words of St. Paul, “He who *began a good work in you* will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ” (Phil. 1:6, emphasis added). Our stewardship always begins with God's work in us. We then respond as reconciled and redeemed recipients of God's merciful goodness and love.

THE KYRIE

The deacon's prayer follows an entrance hymn, song, or introit. The format of this prayer offers several opportunities to underscore stewardship themes. Among the pleas for mercy is the intercessory invitation, “For all who *offer* here their worship and praise, let us pray to the Lord.”

Our offerings are not only of our money, but our whole life is a gift back to Him who is merciful. Worship is our renewed response to God's good news in Christ. We pray for ourselves as well as all who are gathered as God's guests before His altar.

At different points in the history of the liturgy additional petitions were added by the deacon just prior to the words, “Help, save, comfort, and defend us, gracious Lord.” Specific projects

and programs relating to stewardship could be effectively and appropriately added at this time in the prayer. As a family of faith, personal needs are added to the community's concerns.

HYMN OF PRAISE

The traditional hymn of praise is the angelic hymn “Gloria in Excelsis” (Luke 2:14). The newer hymn “This Is the Feast” (Rev. 5:12), an adaptation of an early Christian hymn, has become very popular, especially for the Easter season. It is intriguing to see the stewardship theme in this new song, which echoes the eternal song of God's people: “Worthy is Christ, the Lamb who was slain, whose blood set us free to be people of God. Power and *riches* and wisdom and strength and honor and blessing and glory *are His*” (emphasis added). What a glorious affirmation that we are only the entrusted stewards of His rich blessings. All things belong to Him, and we praise God for His gifts.

THE PRAYER OF THE DAY

The name of this prayer, a “collect,” is of unknown origin, although it can serve as a collective expression of a theme for the day. While there is always a Collect of the Day that is connected to the lectionary readings, there also are other collects that can be used during the Prayers of the Church later in the service. For example, there are several prayers specifically written with stewardship themes in the *Lutheran Service Book: Altar Book*. On Page 449, the prayers carry the following titles: “Grace to use our gifts,” “Against the love of money,” “Proper use of wealth” and even one for “Proper use of leisure.”

There also are other collects during the year that would be very fitting as stewardship-related prayers. See, for example, the following collects during the year in the *LSB Altar Book*: Series A: Proper 13 and 25; Series B: Proper 11, 17 and 21; and Series C: Proper 8 and 10. Consider this Collect for Lent IV in light of your congregation's stewardship education:

Almighty God, our heavenly Father, Your mercies are new every morning; and though we deserve only punishment, You receive us as Your children and provide for all our needs of body and soul. Grant that we may heartily acknowledge Your merciful goodness, give thanks for all Your benefits, and serve You in willing obedience; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

THE SCRIPTURE READINGS

The first reading for most Sundays is from the Old Testament (the exception is during the Easter season). In looking over these texts, numerous lessons from the Old Testament speak about our use of our God-given resources. We are stewards of God's blessings in order to be His blessing to others, as God indicated to Abraham in Genesis 12. There are many of these readings that could help a congregation directly or indirectly consider stewardship themes.

The Epistle reading also allows for many opportunities to consider the subject of stewardship. Paul regularly collected funds for the extension of Christ's kingdom and spoke of our participation in God's service and the fact that we have been bought with a price. James and John often refer to stewardship matters in their epistles too, reflecting a life wholly manifesting a living faith through

attitudes and actions of responsible and spontaneous gratitude. Spending a few minutes asking where the stewardship theme is in a lesson will prove productive and beneficial for a congregation's total program.

THE GRADUAL AND VERSE

Between the lessons, various Old Testament verses are often sung as part of the Gradual or Verse. Numerous themes can be discovered in the psalter. Here are just a few using only the concept of "offering" or the verb "offer." Other themes related to stewardship can be readily searched and employed by discriminating worship leaders.

- › Ps. 4:5: "Offer right sacrifices, and put your trust in the LORD."
- › Ps. 22:25: "From you comes my praise in the great congregation; my vows I will perform before those who fear him."
- › Ps. 25:1: "To you, O LORD, I lift up my soul."
- › Ps. 54:6: "With a freewill offering I will sacrifice to you; I will give thanks to your name, O LORD, for it is good."
- › Ps. 56:12: "I must perform my vows to you, O God; I will render thank offerings to you."
- › Ps. 61:8: "So will I ever sing praises to your name, as I perform my vows day after day."
- › Ps. 116:12: "What shall I render to the LORD for all his benefits to me?"
- › Ps. 100:4: "Enter his gates with thanksgiving, and his courts with praise! Give thanks to him; bless his name!"
- › Ps. 110:3: "Your people will offer themselves freely on the day of your power, in holy garments; from the womb of the morning, the dew of your youth will be yours."
- › Ps. 134:1: "Come, bless the LORD, all you servants of the LORD, who stand by night in the house of the LORD!"
- › Ps. 141:2: "Let my prayer be counted as incense before you, and the lifting up of my hands as the evening sacrifice!"
- › Ps. 148:4: "Praise him, you highest heavens, and you waters above the heavens!"

A brief exercise:

Considering these 12 verses as illustrations, what other terms could be used as an emphasis for stewardship of time, talents and offerings? (Note that Psalm 22, so closely associated with Jesus' words from the cross, has several stewardship themes.)

THE HOLY GOSPEL

The reading from one of the Gospels is part of every service. What is often not recognized is the frequency that Jesus spoke about money and finances. According to one study: Jesus spoke about faith in about 500 verses, on prayer in just over 500 verses, and about money and possessions in more than 2,000 verses! Sixteen of

his 38 parables are related to money and possessions. And one in seven verses in the Synoptics is about money (one in 10, if you add John's Gospel).

While preaching on these texts does not require a full development of a stewardship sermon, certainly noting the presence of a stewardship concept in each of these occurrences can enhance a congregation's recognition of the fullness of God's revelation in relationship to their stewardship of life. A Christ-centered message liberates the hearers to act with an overflowing joy and genuine gratitude.

THE HYMN OF THE DAY

This central hymn by the congregation reiterates the theme of the lectionary texts for a given Sunday worship service. The idea was developed by Lutherans in the 16th century as a way of singing the gradual before the epistle reading. Instead of a psalm or repeating the gradual after the epistle, this hymn underscored the theme for the Sunday. This hymn, sometimes called the sermon hymn when it draws on the theme from the sermon and not directly from the lectionary, is usually placed before or after the sermon. It is the most important hymn in the worship service and provides many opportunities to enable the congregation to express stewardship themes. Consider the following list from *Lutheran Service Book*:

- › "We Give Thee But Thine Own" (LSB 781)
- › "Gracious God, You Send Great Blessings" (LSB 782)
- › "Take My Life and Let It Be" (LSB 783 and 784)
- › "We Praise You, O God" (LSB 785)
- › "Lord of All Good" (LSB 786)
- › "The Temple Rang with Golden Coins" (LSB 787)
- › "Forgive Us, Lord, for Shallow Thankfulness" (LSB 788)
- › "Praise and Thanksgiving" (LSB 789)

In addition to these selections, there are several more in the area of "Society," including the following:

- › "Where Charity and Love Prevail" (LSB 845)
- › "Lord, Whose Love through Humble Service" (LSB 848)
- › "Lord of Glory, You Have Bought Us" (LSB 851)

CREEDAL RESPONSES BY GOD'S STEWARDS

As a response to God's Word, the church has confessed its faith in the Triune God with either the Nicene or Apostles' Creed. These doctrinal statements provide congregations with a weekly opportunity to confess what God has so graciously done for us and to respond to the great blessings of life and salvation we receive through faith.

In the Nicene Creed, we confess that God is “the Father Almighty, *maker of heaven and earth and of all things visible and invisible*” (emphasis added). Such a confession draws out an obvious opportunity to relate these words to our stewardship of all creation. In addition, we are reminded in the second article that we believe “in one Lord Jesus Christ ... by whom *all things* were made.” Again, the fact that Christ not only is our Savior but also was our creator can bring a new observation on the impact of our earthly life itself. Finally, we confess that we “believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord and *giver of life*.” That life is not merely the spiritual life, although that is certainly included, but it also is the physical life we enjoy every day, which is energized by His presence and purpose.

Luther’s explanation of the First Article of the Apostles’ Creed reminds us of the following stewardship-connected ideas: “I believe that God ... gives me ... *all I have*. He richly and daily provides me with *all that I need* to support this body and life” (emphasis added). What a blessing we have in our gracious Father’s gifts to us each day. His explanation of the Second Article reiterates the fact “that I may be His own and live under Him in His kingdom and *serve Him* in everlasting righteousness, innocence, and blessedness.” Likewise, the explanation of the Third Article has the stewardship emphasis upon the Holy Spirit’s continuing work in our lives.

Even the less-used Athanasian Creed has significant stewardship-oriented potential. Consider that we confess in that churchly statement that “at His coming all people will rise again with their bodies and *give an account concerning their own deeds*” (emphasis added). Our lives will certainly reflect our stewardship of all we have and all we are as a result of God’s gifts to us.

PRAYER OF THE CHURCH

After God’s people have heard a proclamation of God’s grace in Christ, the congregation joins together to place their requests before a loving and forgiving Father in heaven through His Son in the power of His Holy Spirit. Among the many concerns to be presented are issues that directly relate to stewardship of life as well as of our money. In the tradition of the church, petitions are made for a variety of people and situations. The simplest form of such a prayer is the intercessory form of asking for some issue or area of concern with the result stated simply and succinctly. A “for ... that ...” formula is most commonly used.

The prayer begins, “Let us pray for ... that ...” Among the topics in this general prayer are the following, many of which have stewardship implications: for the Church, for the Church’s mission, for church leaders, for the nation, for peace, for schools, for homes and families, for all sorts and conditions of people, for our economic and cultural life, for our parish life and for persons in need. At the end of this prayer may come an acclamation of praise for those who have entered the Church Triumphant.

GIFTS OF GRATITUDE

Perhaps no event in a worship service provides more opportunities to engage the congregation in thinking about stewardship. As mentioned in the beginning of this booklet, the psalmist reminds us to “bring an offering, and come into his courts” (Ps. 96:8). If there is any part of a worship service that allows for a variety of expressions

that feature stewardship themes, it is the offertory and the gathering of the congregation’s tithes and offerings.

Traditionally, the Offertory was an organist’s “voluntary” gift to the congregation. It was not something that was specifically designed for the liturgy, but it was an offering composed by the organist as an expression of thanks and praise to God for the opportunity to use one’s talents for His people. Many times, organists were paid for their compositions related to hymn introductions and preludes and postludes. However, for the Offertory, they were not paid but offered a “voluntary” gift of praise. With such a tradition, one wonders whether congregations could have other offertories. Could young children taking violin lessons offer their songs as grace-filled offerings to God? What could be done to enhance the humble offerings made by the local quilters’ group as they prepare their wonderful gifts for many unknown recipients? Could members of the youth group occasionally offer a drama or reading that enhances a stewardship theme?

The text of the Offertory provides another way to emphasize stewardship themes. Each of the Divine Services provides an opportunity to consider a unique aspect of our grateful self-giving back to God: “What Shall I Render to the Lord” certainly is a bold stewardship question based upon Psalm 116 that could be mined of its great wealth of imagery and implications for a generous offering of gratitude. “Create in Me,” based upon Psalm 51, speaks of a “right spirit,” which reflects a spontaneous response for the Lord’s blessings. And the hymn “Let the Vineyards Be Fruitful” (LSB 955), based upon Psalm 104, provides images of our prayers and actions anticipating a heavenly banquet.

Some congregations will use the same offering hymn each Sunday as a way to emphasize this stewardship dimension, such as “We Give Thee But Thine Own” (LSB 781) or “Take My Life and Let it Be” (LSB 783). Although such a practice may be helpful through regular repetition, a seasonal change is not without merit. In one sense, the offering is only symbolic of what we are to do every day of our lives as we serve our Lord and our neighbor throughout the week

PREFACE TO THE LORD’S SUPPER

Interestingly, the Lord’s Supper enables us to consider several opportunities to think about a number of dimensions in the area of our stewardship life. Beginning with the ancient dialogue between pastor and people, there is an opportunity to mention our stewardship of thanksgiving. Note the proper stewardship emphasis even in these responses:

The Lord be with you.
And also with you.

Lift up your hearts.
We lift them to the Lord.

Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.
It is right to give Him thanks and praise.

POST-COMMUNION CANTICLES

The Nunc Dimittis certainly provides stewardship themes as we sing: “Lord, now You let Your servant go in peace; Your word has been fulfilled. My own eyes have seen the salvation which You have

prepared in the sight of ev'ry people: a light to reveal You to the nations and the glory of Your people Israel." Our response to God's gift is to stand ready to serve Him as a witness to the world.

Similarly, the newly composed song "Thank the Lord," based upon Psalm 105, gives several stewardship and witnessing themes for consideration:

*Thank the Lord and sing His praise;
Tell ev'ryone what He has done.
Let ev'ryone who seeks the Lord
Rejoice and proudly bear His name.
He recalls His promises
And leads His people forth in joy
With shouts of thanksgiving.
Alleluia, alleluia!*

THE POST-COMMUNION COLLECT AND BENEDICAMUS

In the collects after communion, we find phrases that echo our appreciation for what God has done, as well as images for our own stewardship. We pray, for example: "We give thanks to You, almighty God, that You have refreshed us through this salutary gift ... We thank You that for His sake You have given us pardon and peace in this Sacrament" Gratitude is always intimately connected to stewardship, and here again we see the element in our liturgy.

This also is evident in the Benedicamus, in which the people respond to the assisting minister's invitation: "Bless we the Lord. Thanks be to God"

AFTER THE BENEDICTION

After the Benediction, our stewardship continues. Our Lutheran Confessions remind us of this fact when they state: "... worship of the New Testament is spiritual, that is, it is the righteousness of faith in the heart and the fruits of faith" (Ap XXIV 27). Our faith in action is an act of worship (Rom. 12:1). So often we forget that from Monday through Saturday we worship too. Our Christian vocations are our responses of faith and demonstrate our stewardship in all dimensions of our lives. Commenting on John 15:8, Luther said in a sermon:

I know that everything I do in the name of Christ must please God, even though it vexes the devil. Therefore I will go my way and perform all the tasks I can and must in my calling, no matter how lowly this calling may be. I know that God places His stamp of approval on them and that they please Him just as much as do the most beautiful, most arduous, and most precious works performed in the highest vocation. Formerly I would never have been able to accomplish this with all the works that might be performed on earth, for we did not know what a Christian life really was. But now that I have learned to know Christ and believe in Him, I can rejoice and boast that everything I do in such faith is pleasing to Him. I can fall down before Him and pray for relief from all distress and need, and I can be sure and convinced that I shall receive help. (*Luther's Works* 24:240)

Several years ago, a book on worship was published under the title *Centripetal Worship* (Augsburg Fortress, 2007, by Timothy Wengert). Corporate worship is designed to send us out into the world to work and witness. That image underscores the importance of stewardship through worship. Congregation members who have "stewardship eyes" will see the redemptive fruit of their living faith flowing outward throughout the week. Worship is not an end but the beginning of a new and renewed life of participation in energized service to Christ in the Church and the world.

Stewardship is a topic that should be a regular part of every congregation's experience. New members grow in their understanding of worship and stewardship through our regular repetition of various associated themes. Our children also see us acting in response to God's blessings and associate stewardship with their daily living. Adult converts similarly are nurtured in their spiritual lives by being fed with biblical references to stewardship in the context of their worship lives. After confirmation class, many of our members need to see stewardship as filling their lives with recognition of God's gracious gifts. A routine of stewardship themes helps our "forgetful members" recall God's rich blessings and see a biblical focus of stewardship in worship as a Gospel-focus for responding.

One group that is often ignored in our regular worship settings is our children. Several years ago, a study by Concordia faculty was published in the LEA Yearbook. They concluded: "For worship to have its full power of meaning for the Christian, whatever the age of that Christian, its meaning must be understood. ... For children, the shared meanings of corporate worship need to be experienced and explored within the context of worship" (LEA Yearbook, Vol. 133:5, 253-254). This study emphasized three areas that can be related to stewardship in worship — ritual, environment and planning.

About ritual, the study concluded: "The absence of many of the historic elements of the liturgy in many of the churches surveyed indicates ... that children's needs may not fully be served by the diminution of ritual and predictability in those worship services" (LEA Yearbook, Vol. 133:5, 254). About the worship environment, these teachers discovered: "Appropriate worship environments for young children teach children about worship. ... Are there symbols which depict the key elements of the faith of the worshipping community? ... Each of the senses can potentially be used by the child to learn more about the faith story of the worshipping community" (LEA Yearbook, Vol. 133:5, 254). In the area of planning, the study determined that "children learn most powerfully and effectively when adults provide experiences which take the child's capacity to comprehend into account. ... This means that there are regular patterns of participation which can be remembered and understood" (LEA Yearbook, Vol. 133:5, 255).

In Conclusion

You will notice that nothing has been said (until now) about pledging and Stewardship Sundays. These certainly provide the most obvious context for teaching about stewardship, yet they also are the most easily dismissed by congregation membership. Keeping stewardship as a feature of worship every Sunday will allow the members to know the love of Christ and to recognize the opportunities to live the faith-filled life in the Spirit for the extension of the Father's kingdom.

Resources

The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod has produced several useful resources for congregational use in worship in bulletins or to project on a screen during the gathering of the congregation's tithes and offerings. Pastors and congregation leaders will want to consider the following:

- › “Bulletin Sentences” that provide simple comments about stewardship for every week of the year.
- › Newsletter articles that can be shortened and included on a monthly basis as a Sunday half-sheet insert into a worship folder.
- › *StewardCAST*, an electronic newsletter by Rev. Nathan Meador that can be abbreviated and edited for a variety of uses in a worship service.

There are hundreds of books on stewardship that have been produced and are available to congregations. Check online from your favorite bookseller. When considering many of these resources, care needs to be taken to assure that the author presents a Gospel-motivated guidance for stewardship

