

PLANNING

Year-Round Stewardship

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This resource is meant to help pastors and congregational leaders implement a plan to teach congregations about stewardship throughout the year.

Food for Thought

Bill and Mary Collins recently moved to a new location and began attending a Lutheran church in town. As they prepared for worship one Sunday, Bill was looking at the service folder. Two words caught his eye. He turned to Mary and said, “This congregation must be getting ready to put a budget together.”

“Why do you say that?” Mary asked.

“Look at the bulletin. See, it says today we will be talking about Christian stewardship.”

“Bill, it’s July. Churches don’t do budget work in July!”

“Oh no,” Bill replied, “it must mean that this church is behind in its budget and we are going to get a pep talk for raising more money.”

“Shh, Bill, the service is starting.”

To Bill’s great surprise, there was no specific mention about money during the service, not in the sermon or in any special announcements. Instead, the “stewardship” emphasis was about vocation and serving the people around you according to the roles God has given you in life.

After the service, Bill made a point to talk to the pastor and share his fears about the service dealing only with money and the church’s budget because the word “stewardship” was mentioned in the service folder.

The pastor told Bill that a number of years ago many of his members might have thought the same thing when they saw or heard the word “stewardship.” However, with patient and consistent preaching, teaching and modeling, he and the congregational leaders developed an understanding of stewardship that was broader than dealing only with money. They helped their fellow members understand that stewardship is about using all that God has given to us according to the vocations that He has placed us in.

This wider view of looking at stewardship through vocation not only includes finances but also managing our time, gifts, skills and whatever else the Lord has given us.

When stewardship is the only aspect of vocation that is ever mentioned, and then it is only at budget planning time, the people understandably connect stewardship with money and never develop a mature attitude toward their vocations. Planning a year-round stewardship and vocation emphasis can help your members mature as stewards of God’s varied grace in every area of life.

Put Vocation in First Place

The famous or infamous three T’s of stewardship are pretty well known: time, talent and treasure. This is one way to try to teach the people that all of life belongs to God and that we are to manage all of life’s resources according to God’s purposes. If we wanted to, we could think of many other “T’s of stewardship” (*tissue* — the care of our bodies; *trash* — the care of God’s creation; *team* — our working together with others in all settings; *tune* — using our voices and musical abilities to bless others). But we don’t need to create a list full of alliteration to teach this, it’s all there in the Lutheran doctrine of vocation.

The word *vocation* means “calling” — God’s calling. God calls us through Baptism to be His Christians. Through marriage, God calls us to be husbands and wives. If the Lord blesses us with children, He calls us to be parents. Each of these callings, these vocations, calls us to service; indeed, they call us to a divine sort of service. God runs the world by using men and women as His instruments. God blesses children by giving them faithful parents to raise them. God blesses the whole world through the work of His Church — a work that all the baptized have a role in.

There is much, much more to say about vocation. Check out *God at Work* by Gene Edward Veith Jr. for a very good discussion. But even with just this brief introduction, you can see how this relates to the financial aspect of stewardship. Each of our vocations has a claim on us — every part of us: our time, our money, our prayers, our concern and so on. A father who gave away his whole income to the church would not be a faithful father. His vocation as father means that he must use that income to raise his kids. Likewise, a Christian who gives but a pittance toward the Word and Sacrament ministry of the church is being unfaithful in his vocation as Christian. That vocation also has a claim on his generosity.

Build a Year-Round Stewardship Calendar

Take a blank calendar and think about the various stewardship and vocation themes that could be emphasized during the 12 months of the year in Bible class or your newsletter.

Here are some suggestions to stretch your thinking about stewardship and vocation:

- › **JANUARY** — Family budgeting, since incomes and expenses often change with a new year. How do we arrange our budgets according to our vocations?
- › **FEBRUARY** — Volunteerism: How much is too much? Again, each vocation has a claim on our time. How can we develop balance?
- › **MARCH** — Spiritual growth
- › **APRIL** — Care of creation
- › **MAY** — Vocation of mother
- › **JUNE** — Vocation of father
- › **JULY** — Vocation of citizen
- › **AUGUST** — Time management
- › **SEPTEMBER** — Skill enhancement
- › **OCTOBER** — Personal money management
- › **NOVEMBER** — Special appeals
- › **DECEMBER** — Growing in generosity

There are many other stewardship and vocation emphases that can be considered for monthly themes. These include topics like:

- › Making a commitment to grow as generous givers
- › Defining a clear congregational vision for mission and ministry
- › Teaching stewardship as faith at work
- › Strengthening personal relationships
- › Identifying, exploring and nurturing the unique gifts that members can put to work in the mission and ministry of the congregation
- › Providing a number of service opportunities

Implement a Year-Round Stewardship Plan

On the LCMS Stewardship Ministry website, there are many fine resources for emphasizing stewardship year-round. These helps include monthly newsletter articles as well as bulletin sentences based on the readings for each Sunday of the church year (in both the one- and three-year lectionaries).

Other helpful stewardship resources include the eight Biblical Stewardship Principles that present a wider view of stewardship as something that can be taught throughout the year, not just at budget preparation and approval time. These principles are available in a number of different versions:

- › Age-appropriate versions for children, youth and adults
- › Versions available in English, Portuguese and French
- › A study guide for teaching the principles

No one ever outgrows his or her need for the Gospel. The Good News of forgiveness of sins, life and salvation is available only because of the sacrifice and saving work of Jesus Christ, the Son of God and only Savior of the world. In all stewardship preaching and teaching — indeed in any preaching about good works — it must be made clear that it is the Gospel of Jesus Christ that motivates Christians into action.

Dr. Martin Luther explained this so clearly in the explanation of the Third Article of the Apostles' Creed with these words:

I believe that I cannot by my own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ, my Lord, or come to Him; but the Holy Spirit called me by the Gospel, enlightened me with His gifts, sanctified and kept me in the true faith.

In the same way He calls, gathers, enlightens, and sanctifies the whole Christian Church on earth, and keeps it with Jesus Christ in the one true faith.

In this Christian Church He daily and richly forgives all my sins and the sins of all believers.

On the Last Day He will raise me and all the dead, and give eternal life to me and all believers in Christ.

This is most certainly true. (*Lutheran Service Book*, p. 323)

Remember That the Size of Your Congregation Is Important

Congregational size is a good starting point for year-round stewardship planning. One of the best indicators of size is the average weekly worship attendance rather than the number of baptized and communicant members of the congregation. Here are a few other points to keep in mind:

- › Congregations function as a system.
- › One system is not better than another.

- › One size is not better than another.
- › A plan that works in a congregation of one size may not work well in a congregation of a different size.
- › Some plans work better in larger congregations and some work better in smaller congregations.

Remember That the Type of Congregation Also Is Important

Here are some other considerations to keep in mind when planning year-round stewardship:

- › New congregation or established congregation?
- › Small congregation or large congregation?
- › Rural, suburban or urban congregation?
- › Congregation with a school or congregation without a school?
- › Large number of newer members or older members?
- › Modest-means congregation or affluent congregation?
- › Stable membership congregation or dynamic, growing congregation?
- › Financially assisted congregation or self-supporting congregation?

The above factors make a difference in how you approach and structure your year-round education. If most members have been in your congregation for some time and if few new members are added each year, you don't repeat certain emphases as often. Assessing the size and type of your congregation will help to educate and assimilate all members as they grow in their stewardship attitudes and practices.

An Exercise

1. Based on information like that discussed above, identify the appropriate opportunities for stewardship and vocation education for your congregation.
2. What "cautions" should you keep in mind as you develop your year-round stewardship planning?
3. What kind of church will you be in five years?
4. What stewardship activities/emphases are important as you prepare for the future?

Additional Exercises

There are several things you can do with money: earn it, spend it, give it, save and invest it, or bequeath it. Discuss the tensions and pitfalls involved with these uses of money. How do your different vocations place a claim on each of these uses of money? The Biblical Stewardship Principles available on www.lcms.org/stewardship provide an excellent introduction for such a discussion.

Another way to approach year-round stewardship is to help people think about appropriate stewardship attitudes and practices for these categories: daily, weekly, monthly, seasonally, annually and life-long.

Based on what you have learned from this resource, what are some things you want to ...

- › Start doing?
- › Stop doing?
- › Continue doing?

Additional Stewardship Helps

Check out stewardship resources from these websites:

- › www.lcms.org/stewardship
- › www.lcef.org — "Products and Services"
- › www.stewardshipadvisors.org — A great variety of stewardship resources
- › www.concordiaplans.org — Information and resources for health, benefits and retirement issues
- › *God at Work: Your Christian Vocation in All of Life* by Gene Edward Veith Jr. (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2002)