

# PILLAR ONE

## Providing Intentional, Systematic, Year-round, Whole-Life Stewardship Education

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### Introduction

Church members grow in their understanding and practice of biblical stewardship as they participate in an ongoing stewardship growth process in the congregation.

The vision of the *Faith Aflame: 360 Degrees* stewardship process is to impact the stewardship culture in every congregation so that all members will know that they are stewards by God's grace, live as disciples of Jesus and manage all that God has entrusted to them with joy and generosity in accordance with their various vocations in church, family and society.

Many congregations continue to struggle with a decline in attendance, the lack of willing workers, not enough financial resources to meet the mission and ministry needs of the congregation, and other issues that impact their lives together. One of the reasons for these and other challenges congregations face is that they have done little if anything in the area of ongoing, intentional, systematic biblical education in stewardship and vocation.

### Stewardship Primer

*"Moreover, it is required of stewards that they be found faithful." (1 Cor. 4:2)*

A primer is defined as material that covers the basic elements of a subject. This Stewardship Primer is designed to help pastors and stewardship committee members review the basics of Christian stewardship and be an encouragement to congregations to embark on intentional, year-round stewardship education that impacts the lives of individual stewards and the life of the congregation as a whole.

### Defining Christian Stewardship

*"You will be enriched in every way to be generous in every way, which through us will produce thanksgiving to God." (2 Cor. 9:11)*

There continues to be much confusion about Christian stewardship. There are many who equate it solely with the giving of money to the church. If the word "stewardship" is mentioned, it means money for budgets, building, salaries and other needs of the

church. Allowing stewardship to be compartmentalized in this way is a tragic mistake both for individual stewards and for corporate stewardship. Stewardship of our financial resources is simply one aspect of living out our vocations in church, family and society.

### The Identity of the Christian Steward

*"For in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ." (Gal. 3:26-27)*

The question "Who am I?" is not to be dismissed lightly or answered in a frivolous way. Knowing who I am is necessary for living as God intends me to live. What role has God given me to play in church? In my family? In society at-large? These roles are the vocations — the holy callings — God has given each one of us to fulfill for His purposes.

A Christian steward is a child of God who realizes his/her role in life as a partner, a trustee, a manager, a caretaker or a temporary custodian of gifts that belong to God. The Christian steward receives God's precious gifts gratefully, manages God's precious gifts carefully and responsibly according to his or her vocations, shares God's precious gifts with others generously, and returns God's precious gifts joyfully with increase.

We have been granted the high privilege of being God's stewards. God created us to be stewards, and He recreated us in Holy Baptism to be Christian stewards. It is a position that comes to us completely by God's grace in Christ. It is who we are in Christ. God also has placed us in families and in society. In each of these spheres, we have a God-given role to play — and each of these vocations makes a claim on the resources God has given us to manage.

Stewards need to know who they are in Christ. But they also need the opportunity to examine their values and attitudes toward the life they live as God's children in the light of God's Word so they can discern what the world is telling them and what God is telling them.

### Christian Stewardship Is a Spiritual Issue

*"For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evils. It is through this craving that some have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many pangs." (1 Tim. 6:10)*

Stewardship is a spiritual issue. It has to do with God's relationship to us in Christ and how we live out that relationship. Every human being becomes a steward at birth. We become Christian stewards

at Baptism. If faith has anything to do with how we are to use our time, our talents and abilities, and the finances entrusted to our care, then stewardship is a spiritual issue. Jesus desires that our hearts be turned to Him.

One of the reasons many churches and many church leaders have relegated stewardship education to the back burner (or do not do it at all) is because they see it as primarily an institutional issue instead of a spiritual issue. Institutional issues are about budgets, buildings, salaries and other financial aspects of church life. Spiritual issues are about the relationship God has established with us in Christ. Christian stewardship is more of a spiritual issue than a financial issue because it is about our life in Christ.

## Who Is the Owner?

*“The earth is the LORD’s and the fullness thereof, the world and those who dwell therein.” (Ps. 24:1)*

What belongs to me? There are three keys to this issue:

### 1. EVERYTHING BELONGS TO GOD.

People do not bring anything with them when they come into the world; when they leave the world, they will take nothing out.

### 2. EVERYTHING DEPENDS ON GOD.

God rules and directs all things in heaven and earth by His almighty power (Psalm 147).

### 3. EVERYTHING IS TO PRAISE GOD.

We have a purpose. All things in heaven and on earth — including us as His people and even those without life in themselves — glorify God, for all show His wisdom, His power and His love.

## The Chief Steward and Stewardship Champions

*“Then the people rejoiced because they had given willingly, for with a whole heart they had offered freely to the LORD. David the king also rejoiced greatly.” (1 Chron. 29:9)*

Stewardship in the congregation must begin with the pastor as chief steward and with leaders who are (or will become) stewardship champions. The pastor should endeavor to become the No. 1 steward within his congregation.

So, of necessity, the first thing the chief steward does is examine his own stewardship life in the light of God’s Word. He will begin by asking, “What kind of steward am I of my relationship with God, within the family God has placed me and within the wider society?”

Congregations need pastors who take the calling of chief steward seriously. Congregations also need lay leaders who are stewardship

champions. Stewardship champions understand and live out their identity as Christian stewards in church, home and society. They understand that they are stewards — not owners — and model their identity as Christian stewards. They manage what God has entrusted to them with joy and generosity in accordance with their vocations so that God’s will is carried out in their lives and in the life of the congregation.

## The Stewardship Culture

*“And this, not as we expected, but they gave themselves first to the Lord and then by the will of God to us.” (2 Cor. 8:5)*

Every organization has a culture. Culture is defined simply as “the way we do things around here.” Every congregation has a macro culture and any number of micro cultures. One of those micro cultures is the stewardship culture. Every congregation has a way of doing things when it comes to stewardship and vocation.

The stewardship culture of the congregation can be difficult to describe. Beliefs and values about whole-life stewardship circulate deep beneath the surface. It will take time to identify, discuss and evaluate the customs, values and artifacts that make up the stewardship culture.

Identifying the stewardship culture is one thing, changing it is quite another. Changing the stewardship culture will require both technical and adaptive solutions. Ronald Heifetz, in *Leadership Without Easy Answers*, defines technical changes as those fixes used to correct ordinary problems in a system as it is. Adaptive changes are those that address fundamental values and that demand innovation, learning and changes in the system itself. To say it another way, technical changes apply a “quick fix” to a situation. Adaptive changes go deeper to change attitudes and values.

In Christian stewardship, most churches have attempted, if anything, only technical change. They have “stewardship programs” that deal with financial issues or use some kind of inventory to discover gifts and talents, but they do little to get at the deeper adaptive issues in stewardship such as values and attitudes. While technical changes are appropriate, they do not go far enough in the area of Christian stewardship.

If the stewardship culture in the congregation is to be changed, it will take adaptive solutions along with technical solutions. Adaptive solutions are not easy because they require continuous learning. There are no “quick fixes” when it comes to Christian stewardship and vocation. The only answer is to teach the Word of God.

*Faith Aflame: 360 Degrees* is an adaptive change process designed to impact the stewardship culture of the congregation. It focuses on the heart of the steward and not just the billfold, purse or checkbook. More about the *Faith Aflame* process can be found at [www.lcms.org/stewardship](http://www.lcms.org/stewardship).