

StewardCAST

A monthly e-newsletter of LCMS Stewardship Ministry

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Stewardship Checkpoints



“Set it and forget it” does not work in stewardship.

Many of us remember the age of the infomercial. It was advertising’s version of performance theatre. These commercials were made to look like television shows, with the intent of creating a sense of desire in the consumer for an “As Seen on TV” product. The original master of this was a man named Ron Popiel. His shtick often included the phrase “set it and forget it.” This was to convince the consumer that his product was almost idiot proof.

“Set it and forget it”?

A “set it and forget it” mentality works when it comes to toaster ovens and food dehydrators. But it does not work in almost any other aspect of life. The truth is that wherever growth is desired, there must be regular checkpoints that measure progress, call to repentance, and lead to intentional effort in moving toward desired goals. A backyard garden is an example of this. If the gardener takes a “set it and forget it” approach, the only thing that is guaranteed to grow is weeds.

The same is true in the area of stewardship. When individuals and congregations adopt a “set it and forget it” approach to stewardship, the only thing that will grow are the weeds of unfaithfulness. Because of sinful human nature, stewards never grow of their own volition. The old Adam naturally takes the idolatrous position of owner rather than the posture of steward. Fallen humanity wants God’s place. There is no room in our fallen thought process for simple, faithful management of the creation entrusted to the steward by the Lord. These weeds will choke out the produce of faithful stewardship. There will be some fruit, but not the amount that was intended by the One who created the steward for service and redeemed him in the water and blood that flowed from the side of His One and Only Son, Jesus.

“Set it and forget it” does not work in stewardship. Yet there are so many pastors, congregations and steward leaders who functionally adopt this approach. These steward leaders make the effort to talk about stewardship once a year. They do a program. They gather commitment cards. At the end of the process these leaders assume one of two postures. Some will seal the cards in a box on the altar only to be returned the following year. Others will gather them, enter them into a church management system, build a budget off the information gleaned from them, and then forget the information until the next year. In both scenarios, there is a lack of cultivation and encouragement. Stewardship is set and forgotten unless there is a budgetary crisis. This approach turns the

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process of raising faithful stewards into one of “hope and pray” rather than cultivation.

When stewardship conversations are avoided at all costs because they might offend someone, this hands-off approach will not properly prepare the soil for a harvest of stewardship growth either. This approach does not even “set it.”

Cultivating the stewardship garden

The cultivation of stewards is necessary throughout the year. It takes work, but the harvest provided by the Lord of the Church makes the effort worthwhile. If pastors and steward leaders wish to be faithful in this cultivation, it is necessary to create “stewardship checkpoints” throughout the year. This could be as easy as reviving the old process of providing quarterly contribution statements that arrive at the home of each

member/steward, accompanied by a letter inviting them to prayerfully reflect on how the Lord has blessed them in the course of the year and how the Lord is calling them to respond. While this could be a physical mailing, it could also be an email generated from a church management program that encourages each steward to log into their online account and ask the same stewardship checkpoint questions. This version of the checkpoint serves as a mirror for the steward that can show them the weeds that need to be pulled in their stewardship garden.

An outward-focused approach

But there is another, outward-focused checkpoint approach that could be adopted as well. This approach focuses on the

corporate work of the stewards within the congregation. Congregations that have been successful in cultivating stewards have adopted some form of this. One congregation used a quarterly mailing that included three elements: a quarterly statement, a two-sided sheet that included bullet points and pictures telling the story of the shared work of the stewards

in the congregation, and a pastoral letter encouraging the steward to prayerfully reflect on God’s trusts and the steward’s response. Other congregations do this monthly during the offering or announcements in worship.

No matter how they do it, these congregations share the story of how the corporate work of the stewards has been used by the Lord to accomplish work for the extension of the Gospel and the benefit of the neighbor. Sharing stories of the faithful stewardship of the Lord’s trust

cultivates the reflection and repentance necessary for growth to happen. In either case, the method used must not be one of manipulation or guilt, but a call to reflection and faithfulness.

These are just two examples of checkpoints and how they work. But some sort of checkpoint approach is necessary if steward leaders are to accomplish their task of cultivating the stewards under their care. When implemented in connection with Word and Sacrament ministry, the Holy Spirit uses these checkpoints to call, gather, enlighten, sanctify and keep the stewards growing for the benefit of their neighbor and the glory of God.

