

# 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.**

**M**any 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.



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