

# StewardCAST

A monthly e-newsletter of LCMS Stewardship Ministry

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## Stewardship Assumed Is the Gospel Denied

Several years ago, the sainted Rev. Herb Mueller wrote a tremendous article while serving as president of the LCMS Southern Illinois District entitled “The Gospel Assumed Is the Gospel Denied.” Later published in *Concordia Pulpit Resources* 15.3, this article nails the need for the faithful preacher to actually preach the Gospel. Mueller rightly points out that “assuming the Gospel is the height of arrogance. It is as if we are saying, ‘We all know what God has done for us in Jesus, so we can go on to teach and learn other things today.’” This assumption of the Gospel in preaching has a deep impact on those who hear this preaching. Again, Mueller hits the nail on the head: “Without clear Gospel preaching, sanctification alone just becomes more law — law that makes God’s people so self-righteous that we don’t see our need for Jesus or so despairing that we don’t believe His forgiveness is for us. When the Gospel is assumed, the sermon will not connect people with its power.”

This last point causes pastors and steward leaders to sit up and take notice. For too long the objection has been raised that any kind of stewardship formation in the congregation is nothing but Law. Preaching of stewardship as Law alone has the negative impacts of which Rev. Mueller warned. It either leads to the self-righteous steward claiming that they have “paid their fair share” or that they “should be given credit for their time and talents” even when their stewardship is lacking; or it leads to such despair that any mention of “stewardship Sunday” will lead God’s people to stay away from the Divine Service for fear that they will once again be beaten down and left for dead by the preaching on that Sunday.

### The narrow way of faithful preaching

This highlights the fine line that the preacher and steward leader walk when preaching and teaching stewardship. To assume anything in this process is to fall into the ditch on either side of the road. But to walk the narrow way of faithful preaching of the Gospel, and thereby faithful preaching of stewardship, is a challenge not for the faint of heart. In fact, humanly it cannot be done. But here is where Mueller’s article gives great comfort: “The Spirit uses the means of grace to gather us for worship, because in those means Jesus Himself comes

It is the proclamation of the Gospel that leads to faithful stewardship.



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to us to serve us with His forgiveness.” This  
 clear Gospel, not assumed but proclaimed,  
 gives the steward leader this confidence:  
 “Our works of service are really the works of  
 Christ through us. He gives us His Spirit to  
 produce fruit.”

It is the proclamation of the Gospel that  
 leads to faithful stewardship. When the  
 steward is led to see from the clear, faithful  
 preaching of the whole counsel of God that  
 they were created to be a steward (GEN.  
 1:26-28) and then in Baptism transformed  
 and restored to that role of steward because  
 of the mercies of God in Jesus Christ  
 (ROM. 12:1-2), there can be neither self-  
 righteousness nor despair. The Gospel  
 preached points to Jesus. Jesus for the  
 steward. Jesus in the steward. Jesus through  
 the steward.

### Stewardship and the Gospel

When the preacher, either out of ignorance  
 of what Scripture and the Confessions  
 say about stewardship, or out of fear of  
 how his hearers might react to even the  
 mere mention of the word “stewardship,”  
 assumes that he can remain silent on  
 the topic, an equally egregious failure  
 occurs. When stewardship is assumed,  
 the Gospel is denied. The steward, created  
 in the image of God and bearing that  
 image in Baptism, still struggles. When  
 stewardship is taught as a mere human  
 work and is judged by the results (e.g., a

balanced budget), the Gospel is denied.  
 This Gospel-denying stewardship teaching  
 robs the hearers of the freedom and new  
 life that only the Gospel can bring! Again  
 Mueller excellently points out, “Growing  
 in sanctification takes place life-long as  
 the Gospel of forgiveness transforms ...  
 relationships by constantly transforming.  
 ... It happens when Jesus’ ‘victory parade’  
 comes into the ‘funeral procession’ of ...  
 life. If we preach Christian living, assuming  
 that we do not have to bring our people to  
 the turning point between law and Gospel,  
 they will remain stuck in their own ‘funeral  
 processions.’ ... Their outward lives may  
 show immediate changes when only the  
 law is proclaimed, but they are still dead in  
 their sin, if they do not hear that Jesus died  
 and rose for them.”

For years steward leaders have known that  
 we cannot assume that faithful stewardship  
 will come about in the congregation  
 without intentional effort. Today, the  
 time has come for those in the position of  
 steward leader to intentionally view their  
 efforts in light of the Gospel. In all of our  
 preaching and teaching we must ask: Are  
 we assuming the Gospel? The answer is  
 repentance. It starts with preparation that  
 is driven by the Bible and not the budget,  
 the cross more than the cost, resurrection  
 rather than result! When steward leaders  
 stop assuming the Gospel, then neither the  
 Gospel nor stewardship are denied!