

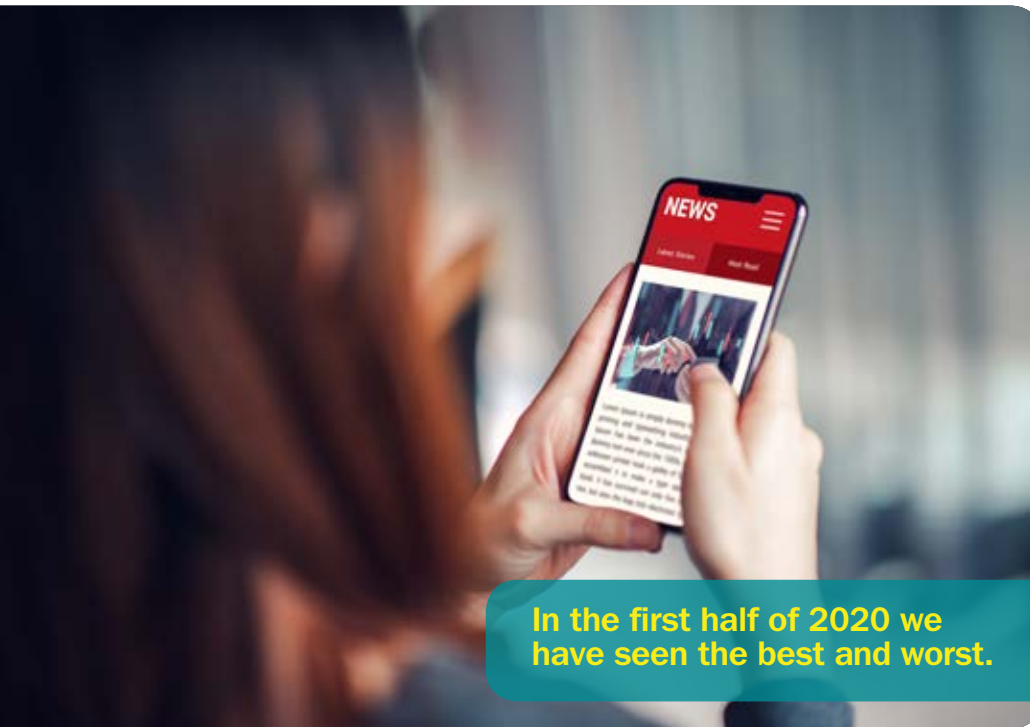
StewardCAST

A monthly e-newsletter of LCMS Stewardship Ministry

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Stewards for Such a Time as This



and worst. The advent of coronavirus and then the civil unrest of recent weeks have us nodding our heads in agreement with Dickens. The days of Dickens' story are very much like our present period, in both good and evil.

The best of times, the worst of times

The evil is apparent. But then again, this is nothing new. Already in Genesis 6 our Lord made the gruesome proclamation that the intent of man's heart was always and only evil continually. Man's inhumanity to man grows more commonplace and far less shocking. But when one hits the Google button often enough and searches in the right places, there are daily discoveries of the selfless service of God's people on behalf of those who are blind, dead enemies of God apart from the person and work of Jesus Christ.

These months of 2020 have been the best of times and the worst of times for stewardship as well. When the "safer at home" orders began to roll like a tidal wave from coast to coast, there was a grave fear among far too many congregations that, without regular in-person worship, the consequences would be dire for every level of ministry in the church in general and the LCMS in particular. The fears faced in these moments were real! In many ways, they continue to be real. This fear most certainly did engender a feeling of "the worst of times" for stewardship leaders and pastors.

Charles Dickens starts his classic work *A Tale of Two Cities* with these words:

"It was the best of times, it was the worst of times, it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness, it was the epoch of belief, it was the epoch of incredulity, it was the season of Light, it was the season of Darkness, it was the spring of hope, it was the winter of despair, we had everything before us, we had nothing before us, we were all going direct to

Heaven, we were all going direct the other way — in short, the period was so far like the present period, that some of its noisiest authorities insisted on its being received, for good or for evil, in the superlative degree of comparison only."

As we move to the midpoint of the year of our Lord 2020, Dickens starts to sound like he could be talking about our present day. But as the preacher of Ecclesiastes would concur, there is nothing new under the sun. In the first half of 2020 we have seen the best

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But, as is often the case when it comes to human fears, the Lord provided. While the challenge was indeed real, the “best of times” response of God’s individual stewards was nothing short of amazing. Congregations were supported by God’s faithful people at levels that many did not anticipate. While there were no plates to pass, envelopes arrived in church offices. Electronic forms of financial stewardship were either expanded or introduced, to surprising results. Without a doubt, congregations that had taken the time before the COVID-19 challenge to cultivate a culture of stewardship that flowed from the generosity of God to His people fared far better than feared. In some cases, stewardship was better after the months of shutdown! God is indeed good!

God’s tasks for these times

For such a time as this, God has given the task of stewardship to His people. We are called to faithful stewardship in times of plenty and in times of want, in times of certainty and uncertainty. As stewards of the creation trust granted to each of us, we care for our neighbors and serve the Lord all at once. The local congregation comes together as faithful stewards to be that outpost of the Gospel in a world that is awash in darkness. These were the best of times when congregations stepped up to supply meals to hungry neighbors and support to essential workers and those who provide protection.

These faithful stewards were used by God to ensure that there was a transition to virtual worship services, which also allowed for those who were distant from the congregation to reconnect and those who had not ever been a part of it to catch a glimpse of the reason for the hope that comes in the Gospel of Jesus Christ. It was

these actions driven by grace through faith, through the work of the Holy Spirit, that transformed the dark moments of infectious fear into avenues for the Gospel.

Faithful stewards, formed and fueled by the Gospel, are the medium God uses to bring the best results even from the worst of times. Neighbors reaching out to neighbors in support and understanding, mutual conversation and consolation

because of what Christ has done for them, is exactly what the stewards of the Gospel do today. Infection and injustice are but two of the triggers for the work of faithful stewards who will not be conformed to the mentality of a godless, dying world. It is for such a time as this that God’s stewards are to be rallied around Word and Sacrament, not only to preserve the institution, but to project the freeing light of the Gospel into a world that is clearly dying.

The first half of 2020 could be viewed as the worst of times. One crisis after another has descended upon us. In fact, we have almost

completely forgotten the murder hornets! But stewards of the Gospel know that seeing 2020 as a string of crises misses the point of stewardship. Rather, 2020 has presented a string of challenging opportunities for individual stewards and the congregations of which they are a part to be beacons of light! Stewards are temporary guardians of creation, a trust given for the sake of the Gospel which leads us to an eternal reality where there will be no more challenges, only Jesus!

Stewards are called for such a time as this. The Spirit focuses us on the cross and empty tomb. The light emanating from them overcomes challenges and brings joy. This is why Jesus came. Of this we are stewards!



As stewards of the creation trust granted to each of us, we care for our neighbors and serve the Lord all at once.