AMERICANS ARE CONSTANTLY OPERATING LIKE THE LONE RANGER in just about every aspect of life. While most do not even remember the masked character portrayed on television by Clayton Moore, they are still looking for his signature trademark: the silver bullet. Scroll through social media feeds and you will find sponsored ad after sponsored ad selling some kind of “silver bullet” for many and various aspects of life. Overweight and out of shape? There is a sure-fired seven-minute workout that they will sell you so that you can trade your dad bod for a six pack. Not feeling well? There is an iron-clad, one-tablet-a-day cure for that in the form of the next super supplement from beets or carrots or rutabagas. Professional or spiritual life a mess? Buy this one super duper day planner and everything will fall into place! These are just the tip of the iceberg when it comes to our searching for the "silver bullet" in life.

Buyer beware

Yet, “caveat emptor.” Buyer beware! Often, the “silver bullet” that is discovered turns out to be fool’s gold. Those seven minutes for workouts do not really pan out. The supplement costs more than first thought and leaves you feeling no different. The day planner soon ends up on the shelf just like the last three latest and greatest productivity tools. Why is this? Because the Lone Ranger was a fictional character. The masked man that rode around getting the bad guys and saving the day for the townsfolk does not exist in the real world.
Silver bullets do not exist in stewardship either. Sure, over the years there have been attempts at mass producing these silver bullets in the production of program after program. Buy this program, this book, this method and all the congregational and individual stewardship concerns will be done away with in one 30-minute episode. Find the right chart. Design the right card. Shoot the slickest video. Build a better stewardship mousetrap and the world will beat a path to your door! These promises may not show up in your news feed, but they do in your email and snail mail box.

There is no “better mousetrap” when it comes to stewardship. While there are some elements that may work from time to time, there is really, only one true key when it comes to teaching stewardship. Teach stewardship! Start with God’s Word. Add more of God’s Word. Then conclude with God’s Word in all its forms. The key is to stop treating the teaching of stewardship as if it is some concocted celebration like Mother’s Day. The steward leaders in the congregation, both pastors and laity, need to be teaching stewardship year-round.

Stewardship throughout the Church Year

As a liturgical church, the LCMS is in a perfect position to do this. The lectionary is a great tool for this. It has historically led the preacher away from his favorite topics and forced him to engage the whole counsel of God. Whether the congregation employs the three-year or one-year lectionary series, there is ample opportunity to address stewardship throughout the year. This means that, when the text allows, stewardship should be just as clearly taught from the pulpit in July as it is in January, and in April as it is in November. This is true because the stewardship of the individual and the congregation really comes down to one thing: stewardship of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Stewardship is about who the individual Christian is called to be, rather than just about one component of their life. Certainly, financial stewardship is a part of it. The congregation should regularly talk about the faithfulness of those whom God has gathered around Word and Sacrament in that place.

Another important part of teaching stewardship is the call to repentance. This is the entirety of the Christian life! In the daily remembrance of Baptism, the Christian is taken back to the font, drowned and raised by the work of the Holy Spirit. When the steward fails, there is only one prescription: Law and Gospel. The forgiveness of sins and the Spirit leading through the sanctified life is the very heart of what it means to be living as a steward of the Gospel. All that we have to support this body and all we need to be given the new life of faith in Christ are trusts to us from God. They really are not gifts. They are trusts. A gift entails a change in ownership. A trust requires fiduciary responsibility and accountability. The steward daily falls short of the standard laid out by the Master. Only the Master can pardon and restore the steward. In Christ, He does.

This becomes the key to stewardship: teaching, from God’s Word, that the fallen steward is forgiven and restored to the task of stewardship.