As we approach the fall of this very strange year, many congregations turn their thoughts toward their annual stewardship emphasis. And the temptation for many may be to dread this. That is understandable. Statistics indicate that across the Synod, there has been stewardship stress at every level. There are many reasons why this may be. Fewer in worship could well lead to less support for the ministry. Job losses, illness and other family stressors can put a crimp in generosity.

The general anxiety that surrounds this entire COVID-19 era can put a damper on giving and service. This could lead to either a dread of talking about stewardship or a presentation of stewardship that flows from dire circumstances.

But neither is the case! Our Lord is still the Giver of every good and perfect gift! Our Lord still gives us everything we need to support this body and life! God gives. We receive. This happens in times of plenty and in times of want. It also happens in times of joy and in times of anxiety! Biblical stewardship is the teaching that these good and perfect gifts are simply trusts which our Lord has placed upon us to be used for the extension of the Gospel and the glory of His name! We don’t dread the preaching of the Gospel. It is music to the ears of sinner/saints like us! Teaching stewardship should not be dreaded either. It is simply the pastor reminding the congregation why they exist. They exist to be stewards of the Gospel!
Encouraging stewards through stories

In the midst of this very difficult time, great stories of stewardship have arisen. Individuals and congregations have stepped up in supporting their neighbors, not to get on the evening news, but because the Lord has placed them in the community to serve. They have provided grab and go meals in the place of community dinners. They have organized systems of delivery and support for those who are in the most vulnerable demographics during the pandemic.

Neighbors and business owners have made internet access available to families that are struggling to meet the challenge of virtual learning.

There have been people who have become even more generous toward their local congregation, the district mission or the work of the Synod simply because they are aware of the great need to be a light for the Gospel in this time of lingering darkness and despair.

When the steward leader sees and tells these stories to the congregation, it is the greatest form of encouragement. It shows that individual stewards can be creative in the ways in which they share the gifts that have been entrusted to them. This creativity is really the mark of a faithful steward — assessing what the Lord has given in trust to them and asking how these trusts can be used for the benefit of the neighbor and the glory of God.

If you have unique stories of this kind of mercy-based stewardship, would you please share them? You can send them to stewardship@lcms.org. We would love to share them as potential opportunities for the growth of stewards around the church!

A time for stewardship formation

In the stories and the impact that they have, stewardship is much more like Thanksgiving Day than Tax Day. Teaching stewardship is a necessity because we and those we serve so often forget why the Lord has created and redeemed them! Please don't skip intentional teaching of stewardship this fall or ever! As your congregations turn its attention to this annual task there are some great resources available at lcms.org/stewardship.

But don't limit your approach to things programmatic. Encourage the stewards entrusted to your care to find new and faithful ways to be stewards of their resources in a selfless manner. There is really no limit.

The stewards you serve have faced so many restrictions in the past six months. They have lost opportunities for memories with their children at confirmations, graduations, weddings and funerals that have been postponed or scaled down. Access to the Lord’s house and Table have been restricted in many locations. Use this time of stewardship formation to lead the saints under your care to see the opportunities for stewardship of the Gospel. It is financial support for ministry. But it is also so much more. Open to them the great joys of serving as stewards in the much smaller settings of family, neighborhood and congregation. These are just as much stewardship of the Gospel as is writing the check or making the online contribution. We look forward to hearing about them!