Toward Developing New Stewardship Perspectives

In the coming year, our Synod will offer several opportunities to grow the steward leaders and expand the breadth in understanding of what that means. Stewardship is a topic that is much more rich and multifaceted than is usually considered. While stewardship is not only about money, it is about money, so for this article, financial stewardship is the focus.

Are you, like me, brought up to thinking it is not polite to talk about money (with the result that many of usentered early adulthood very poorly equipped for money management), while also being taught the expectation that you must give money to the church, ideally as a tithe. Or was your experience more along the lines that money is something that is “mine” so I can choose to share what I have after I’ve taken care of my expenses, but what I do with my money is my business? There is a bit of heresy, I believe, in both ends of this nuanced continuum. God has created us as most actualized when we experience gratitude (versus a sense of entitlement) and live out generosity. Secular studies demonstrate this—it’s not just a religious view, by the way. A more faith-based perspective, acknowledges that *all* that we are, have access to, or are passionate about, is entrusted to us through the generosity of God so that we might live out our lives as faithful people of God, following in the footsteps of Jesus to make a difference in the world (i.e. be a light/blessing to the nations).

Maybe we’re so uncomfortable talking about money in the life of the church because we don’t want to acknowledge either its ultimate source nor the power we give it over us. But we cheat ourselves and discount God when we think that God is only interested in a small fraction of our lives. Indeed, because it has gained such meaning in our lives, God has interest in 100% of our involvement with money (e.g., how we earn it, spend it, share it, invest it, think about it, and save it) precisely because God wants good for us and not evil, not because God wants to arbitrarily control us. When we are willing to have open, frank faith-based discussion around matters of money, our relationship with it changes and we will often experience a freeing from the “tyranny of money” that sometimes happens because of our misaligned attitudes with this resource.

 To help facilitate more open conversation and broader perspectives surrounding money’s place in our lives, over 2018 we will offer several streams of opportunity to explore financial stewardship. These include:

**Stewardship for All Seasons**, a comprehensive, accompanied yearlong financial stewardship development process provided through GSB’s professional development services (Grolund, Sayther, Brunkow). Reports from the Greater Milwaukee Synod and the Rocky Mountain Synod, among others who have engaged this consulting group speak to strong positive impact and we want to share this opportunity with you in shared cost partnership. At this point, the target start is April; more information will come in the new year.

**Charles (Chick) R. Lane and Grace Duddy Pomroy** will provide a daylong **Embracing Stewardship Event** on April 28th, where they share from their differing generational perspectives, a shared conviction that practicing stewardship is an essential spiritual discipline for both individuals and faith communities. We will have their book *Embracing Stewardship: How to put stewardship at the heart of your congregation’s life*, available. This is your “save the date” first notice about what will undoubtedly be a stimulating day.

For another brewing idea, I need your help. I would like to gather a team of people to help me provide an interactive, multi-generationally appropriate, **Generosity Project Workshop** to area congregations across the synod. This workshop will not only engage participants in interactive learning, but it will prepare participating teams to facilitate a similar event back in their congregations. Please let me know of your willingness to provide workshop leadership (roles available from organization to presentation) or of your congregation’s willingness to host an event next fall.

These are but a few other ideas in the works, as we seek to feed and equip leaders to more fully embrace their steward leader gifts. Other areas in development or currently available include: moving into year-around stewardship emphasis; facilitated asset mapping events; developing narrative budgets; storytelling and thanks-giving initiatives; environmental stewardship; and personal finance initiatives. Do not hesitate to contact me to explore further options.