

StewardCAST

A monthly e-newsletter of LCMS Stewardship Ministry

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Maturing as a Christian Steward

Growing up is a process that the Lord has hardwired into every creature, and problems can arise if different stages don't happen on time. That's why parents worry if their child is "late" as a talker or a walker, shorter than he should be for his age, or behind in his reading skills. According to the created order, every creature is designed to mature from a baby to an adult.

The same thing is true of those called to faith in our Lord, Jesus Christ. In Holy Baptism, we are born into a new and living hope, created in us by the "breath of life" that enters into

our lifeless, sin-tainted flesh. The old has gone, and the new has come. With new life comes infancy and the expectation of maturing in salvation. St. Peter captures this sentiment when he writes, "Like newborn infants, long for the pure spiritual milk, that by it you may grow up into salvation — if indeed you have tasted that the Lord is good" (1 PETER 2:2-3).

Fed on 'milk, not solid food'

Just as a human infant can't handle a meal of steak and potatoes, neither can spiritual infants. St. Paul writes to the Corinthians, saying, "But I, brothers, could not address

you as spiritual people, but as people of the flesh, as infants in Christ. I fed you with milk, not solid food, for you were not ready for it. And even now you are not yet ready, for you are still of the flesh" (1 COR. 3:1-3). The writer to the Hebrews also captures this need for spiritual maturity and the dangers of not maturing when he writes, "For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the basic principles of the oracles of God. You need milk, not solid food, for everyone who lives on milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness, since he is a child. But solid food is for the mature, for those who have

their powers of discernment trained by constant practice to distinguish good from evil" (HEB. 5:12-14). To fail to mature is a failure to be who the Lord has created and redeemed us to be.

This is where maturity also becomes a stewardship issue. The Lord has entrusted life to His people. From the very beginning, the task of the human being was to steward this gift of life as a reflection of God Himself. The reflection that has fallen to the steward cannot be separated into distinct categories that are only physical or only spiritual. Stewardship is holistic; it was never designed to be static. Just as the child is expected to grow and mature, so also the steward is called by the Lord to a faithfulness that grows in maturity.

A solid course of nutrition

So, how does one mature as a steward? Since stewardship is holistic, cues can be taken from the physical realm. For instance, a child grows through proper nutrition, exercise and rest. A steady diet of Twinkies, fast food and soda pop will not bring about the same kind of maturity as a diet of fruits, vegetables and proteins. Similarly, the mind will not mature without the assistance of a sound education. This might take place in the classroom, but it also includes formation

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through mentoring and apprenticeship. Congregations are full of mature members — even though for some, their formal education ended after high school. There also are many people who carry multiple degrees but lack the wisdom of maturity!

The Christian steward matures in a similar manner. There must be a solid course of nutrition that feeds the steward. The "meat and potatoes" is Word and Sacrament ministry. Stewardship maturity begins at the baptismal font, the altar and the pulpit. But it doesn't stop there. Stewardship maturity also is fed in Bible study and small-group discussion in the congregation and the family room. The Word does the work! God makes them, and God matures them!

This is not just an academic or liturgical exercise. The steward's maturity leads to activity, and this activity is so much more than just scribbling out a check, tucking cash in an envelope or making an online contribution. Stewardship maturity involves the whole person: Head, heart, hands and wallet combine to become an incarnational stewardship that invests completely in the reflection of the Owner, our Creator and Redeemer.

Rest also is an ingredient in the maturity of a steward. But this rest does not involve lounging on the couch or swaying in the backyard hammock. No, the rest that leads the steward to maturity is a Sabbath rest. Just as the Lord calls the steward to physical rest to keep the body healthy so it can mature, so also the steward needs the rest that Jesus



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talks about in Matthew 11. “Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light” (MATT. 11:28-30). This rest comes from the forgiveness of sins in the Means of Grace. Maturing stewards need forgiveness because they will not always be the stewards that the Lord has called them to be. Stewardship maturity can't happen if the steward is dogged by his or her own failures.

An ongoing process

Formation is the key for stewardship maturity. It is more than simply disseminating information. The “once a year stewardship program focused on making the budget” will not cut it. A child will not grow if he is only fed once a year. A student will not mature if she is only taught for a couple of weeks each year. Formation for stewardship maturity must be intentional, systematic and all-encompassing. A year-round, intentional effort that emanates from the pulpit, classroom and hands-on service will open

the door to the stewardship maturity that is needed in the local congregation.

This ongoing quest is not an easy one. It takes planning and effort. Education is only part of formation. Taking maturing stewards through what the Scriptures and Lutheran Confessions teach is an important component in stewardship maturity. But stewardship maturity comes when the creational and baptismal identity of the steward is held before the congregation on a consistent basis. This will not happen by accident. Steward leaders who fail to intentionally pursue the formation process of spiritual maturity in the congregation will find only frustration.

But all is not lost. Remember, maturity is part of the created order. This is clear in the Scriptures. When the Gospel is proclaimed, the Word is taught, and the soul and body are fed in the Sacrament, stewardship maturity can and will happen. It is God's task, not ours! Steward leaders are simply called to be faithful stewards of that which the Lord uses to bring about stewardship maturity in those people they are called to serve.

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