

StewardCAST

A monthly e-newsletter of LCMS Stewardship Ministry

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“How can we best communicate ... that stewardship is more than just the church begging for more money?”



The REAL Currency of Stewardship

At a recent gathering of people focused on the topic of stewardship, a very practical question was asked: “We are here. We hear what you are saying. How can we best communicate to those who will not attend an event like this that stewardship is more than just the church begging for more money?” This practical question is the one question that is front and center in the minds and work of steward leaders in the local congregation, as well as at district and synod levels. The discovery of an answer to this question will go a long way in refocusing the culture of stewardship at each level.

The difficulty comes in the fact that there is really no solid “quick fix” answer to this million-dollar stewardship question. This reality is not stated in an effort to kick the can down the road, but it is necessary for the steward leader to embrace reality. Far too much effort is expended in easy answers in the area of stewardship. Easy answers often create more issues than they solve.


Simple solutions that deceive

The first “easy answer” often attempted is to go the programmatic route. There are those who hold that all you need is the right

program, the right consultant, the shiniest print piece and catchiest communication handles, and everything will fall into place. To be sure, there are some fine programs available to the local congregation that will help foster an environment of sound stewardship in the local congregation. There are indeed congregations that can benefit from the guidance of a well-trained professional to assist in stewardship planning. Well-done print communication with a message that is well thought out can also be very helpful. But these items alone will not turn the stewardship skeptic into a committed steward.

Another “easy answer” that is attempted is one that appeals to guilt. These impassioned pleas have come from pastors and congregational leaders. They attempt to make stewardship a logical activity. These appeals speak of the need to sacrifice things like trips to the coffee shop, dining out and other leisure activities as part of enhancing stewardship toward the local congregation. But these attempts to spur greater stewardship, which are emotional and guilt-riddled and not logical at all, only succeed in reinforcing the false narrative that the congregation is really oriented toward manipulative stewardship. Have you ever wondered why so many people have a visceral reaction to stewardship? It is because they have been subject to some form of this “easy answer.”

Yet another logical attempt at an easy answer to the stewardship objection is to try and make the scope of stewardship too small. This is done in the compartmentalization of stewardship. Reducing stewardship to categories like “time, talent and treasure” can often be logical and well meaning. They do, however, very often lead to making stewardship into a checklist. The skeptical



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steward may say, “I have given my time. I have given my talent. Two out of three isn’t bad. I will keep my treasure.” This easy answer actually weakens the very stewardship it attempts to encourage.

Called, gathered and enlightened: A matter of identity

While there are no “easy answers” to the objections the original question posed, there

are answers. There is no greater answer than to point the objector to Holy Scripture. But the passage that should occupy the initial push into God’s Word should not include reference to giving. The first move should not be to highlight the activity of the steward. This only confuses the matter. Rather, the initial focus needs to be on the identity of the steward. Passages that highlight that stewards are stewards because they were made for this purpose (GENESIS 1 AND 2) and that they have been redeemed for this purpose (ROMANS 12:1-2) are good places to start.

Steward leaders are not solely in the business of getting people to do the activity of stewards. Steward leaders are about the task of highlighting the identity of the steward. Identity gives purpose to activity. This truth covers much of life in general but is specifically applicable in the realm of stewardship. The purpose of the steward, as illustrated from God’s Holy Word, allows the Holy Spirit to do the work. The wayward steward is restored to faithful stewardship by the Spirit calling, gathering, enlightening,



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sanctifying and keeping them by the power of the Gospel. The activity of the steward will then flow freely from the work of the Holy Spirit into the lives of those the steward helps bring to repentance. While the faithful response of the individual steward is just that — individual — this response is not just that of the individual in action. It is the Lord working in and through the steward by the Holy Spirit.

This appeal to the identity of the steward will also broaden the horizon of the skeptical steward. If the usual objection is financial stewardship, appealing to the Word's call of whole life stewardship also debunks the idea that stewardship is only about money. All of life and life's resources are on the list of things that are nurtured for the sake of the Gospel and those who need to hear it. This approach makes stewardship a holistic approach rather than a piecemeal one. This is important because the steward was designed to be a whole, not just the sum of his or her parts. This approach actually flows from who God made the steward to be.

Modeling a vocation of joyful service

While the length of this response to that one stewardship question has grown, there is one tremendous answer that is often overlooked: modeling. Skeptical stewards need to see and hear about faithful stewards in action. This means the congregation needs to be highlighting and telling the stories of those who have been moved by the Holy Spirit to use all of their life and life's resources for God's purposes. When skeptical stewards

are able to see faithfulness in action in light of who God has called them to be, it gives a visible pattern for them. Parents are a prime example of this. Children will very often model the stewardship they were shown by mom and dad. But it can go beyond the nuclear family. Telling the faithful stewardship stories of brothers and sisters in Christ in the congregation indeed does strengthen and encourage the congregational family.

Sometimes these stories might well be fit for an illustration by the pastor in the pulpit. However, it might well be better that these stories be told as encouragement in other media. Interviews in newsletters or even short video clips shared through electronic communication can also be very powerful tools in answering the skeptical steward. When people who are just like they are — young or old, wealthy or poor, bored or busy, those on fixed incomes or those with growing assets — are seen being who the Lord has made and redeemed them to be, it can be a powerful teaching tool. Done well, this can be the best currency to buy a second look at faithful stewardship in the lives of the skeptical steward.

Leaders, as faithful stewards, know that stewardship is more than money. They know it is a call to be “all in” for the Gospel. When objections are raised to stewardship, it is important that the right currency is spent. Devoid of easy answers, it takes the regular application of God's Word and the visible investment of faithful stewards to serve as an example for those who would be the stewards God has made them to be!

