

# FAITH AFLAME *God's Steward*

A Stewardship Newsletter • Fall 2008 • Vol. 1 No. 1

**W**elcome to the first issue of the "Faith Aflame: God's Steward" newsletter. The purpose of this occasional newsletter is to elevate and enlarge stewardship in the congregations of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod. This first issue focuses on the current state of biblical stewardship in the church. It also encourages congregational leaders to examine the stewardship culture of their church and take steps to make changes where needed.

## "Righting the Steward Ship"

Biblical stewardship has fallen on hard times; as a matter of fact, it has been maligned for quite some time. The following quotes make that clear (notice the dates after the quotes).

■ "Within the Christian Church as a whole, the word stewardship is an unpopular word. In the minds of most people the word calls up associations that are not altogether pleasant. This is because the people of the church have come to think of stewardship largely in terms of the raising of money."

Holmes Rolston in *Stewardship in the New Testament Church*, 1946.

■ "Fact is, the vessel of stewardship rides on troubled waters today . . . the word has been betrayed by church leaders trying to assure congregations that stewardship is really not about giving money to the church. Instead they say, 'It is about a relationship with God.' [But] the charade has not worked. When churchgoers hear stewardship, they think 'Give money.' "

Patrick H. McNamara in *More Than Money*, 1999.

■ "To some extent, the whole discussion of godly stewardship has been taken off the table in most

churches and ministries. Pastors do not like to preach about it, nor do parishioners like to hear about it; few people write about it, and even less read about it . . . The very word smacks of tawdry fundraising schemes, heavy handed techniques, poor stewardship sermons, guilt giving and ecclesiastical graft. It brings to mind the charge 'the church only wants my money' and all the variants on that theme."

R. Scott Rodin in *Stewards in the Kingdom*, 2000.

■ "The word 'stewardship'—a wonderfully iconic word—has been so abused and flattened by usage in relation to the church's practice and programs around money that it elicits little but yawns and chills when we hear or read it."

Dan Dick in *Beyond Money*, 2006.

■ "Stewardship has been kidnapped and is being held hostage by a sinister villain named 'Paying the Bills.' "

Charles R. Lane in *Ask, Thank, Tell*, 2006.

Should stewardship be pulled from the scrap heap of misuse and disuse? Can it be salvaged? Is it worth the hard work of reclamation? The answer is a resounding yes! Biblical stewardship is after all biblical! Biblical stewardship began in the loving heart of God who created us and gave us the responsibility of having

dominion (being stewards) of the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and over every living creature that moves on the ground. Biblical stewardship began in the loving heart of God when He sent His Son to buy us back from sin, death and the devil—so that we

### DEFINITION OF CHRISTIAN STEWARDSHIP:

*Christian Stewardship is the free and joyous activity of the child of God and God's family, the church, in managing all of life and life's resources for God's purposes.*



might have abundant life. Biblical stewardship began in the loving heart of God when He made us a part of His forever family in Holy Baptism. Biblical stewardship calls us to live as His children, to glorify His name, and to serve our neighbor. Biblical stewardship is worth preaching about, teaching about, and rescuing from the clutches of the sinister villain named above—because it is biblical. Biblical stewardship is about a whole lot more than money—it is about our very lives.

Douglas John Hall in *The Steward: A Biblical Symbol Come of Age* argues that the concept of human stewardship is pertinent for articulating the Gospel today. “Ours is a world in which human beings are required to find a new way of conceiving of their identity and vocation; otherwise there can be no averting the catastrophic future we are courting,” Hall writes (page 76). That “new way” is in the biblical symbol of the steward. “The metaphor of the steward,” Hall notes, “is conspicuously present in the biblical tradition . . .”

That biblical symbol of the steward is tremendously important for the church today. For many, however, that symbol has become blurred.

It has become blurred in the area of ownership. Most churchgoers believe that what they have is theirs. They own it. The Bible makes it clear that this is not true. Psalm 24:1 says, “The earth is the LORD’S, and every-

thing in it, the world, and all who live in it.” Stewards cannot be owners. The terms, by definition, are mutually exclusive. “Here,” writes R. Scott Rodin, “the characteristic mark of the biblical steward—handling with integrity the resources of another—is completely lost.”

It has become blurred in the area of accountability. Few churchgoers believe that they, as stewards, have positions of high authority in the household of the owner and that they are given great responsibility. They fail to understand that everything they have is given to them by God as a trust—to use for His purposes.

It has become blurred in the area of service. Many churchgoers fail to recognize that they have a responsibility as stewards to care for the possessions of God, the Owner, for the benefit of other people—their neighbors.

The vision for stewardship is to bring into sharper focus the concept of stewardship. It is to encourage a stewardship culture in all congregations so that every professional church worker, every man, woman, and child will know that they are God’s steward by His grace, live as His disciples, and manage the gifts He entrusts to them with joy and generosity—all so His purposes would be accomplished and His mission enhanced.

To accomplish that task will take the blessing of God, the power of the Holy Spirit working through Word and Sacraments, and the effort and patience of church leaders as they examine and work toward changing the stewardship culture of the congregation so that the biblical symbol of the steward is clearly understood as touching all of life—not just finances.

Below are a few resources that can help you, as a church leader, examine and work toward changing the stewardship culture.

- *Faith Aflame: 360 Degree Stewardship* is a stewardship process produced by the LCMS Missouri District. The first year of the process contains tools to help congregations assess their stewardship culture. For more information, contact Stewardship Ministry at [stewardship@lcms.org](mailto:stewardship@lcms.org)
- Durall, Michael. *Beyond the Collection Plate: Overcoming Obstacles to Faithful Giving*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2003.
- Lewis, Robert and Cordeiro, Wayne. *Culture Shift: Transforming Your Church From the Inside Out*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2005.
- McNamara, Patrick H. *More Than Money: Portraits of Transformative Stewardship*. The Alban Institute, 1999.



# Faith Aflame Toolkit:

## Congregational Stewardship Culture

*A discussion sheet for leaders to use in the assessment of the stewardship culture of the congregation.*

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Paul Hiebert describes culture as an integrated system of learned patterns of behavior, ideas, and products characteristic of a society or group.

**BEHAVIOR** refers to action patterns that are characteristic of a cultural grouping. What learned pattern of behavior have the members exhibited in each of the areas identified below:

1. What percentage of the membership is regular (you define regular) in their weekly worship attendance?
2. What percentage of the membership is regular (you define regular) in their attendance at the Lord's Supper?
3. What percentage of the membership is regular (you define regular) in attending Sunday school/Bible class/small groups?
4. What percentage of the membership is generous (you define generous) in their financial giving?
5. What percentage of the financial gifts given to the congregation are used for mission endeavors beyond the congregation—through district and synod?

### Discussion Questions:

- What do the above behaviors suggest about your congregation?
- Considering the above percentages, how could you—as congregation leaders—help congregation members in their spiritual journey as stewards?
- What specific steps should the congregation take to address each of the issues identified?

**IDEAS** indicate that each culture has a certain view of life and relationships, though within that view may be many viewpoints. What learned views/attitudes do the majority of the members have in each of the areas identified below:

1. What would most of the members say is the purpose and/or mission of this congregation? (Does this portray an inward or outward focus?)
2. How do most of the members view the use of time for God's purposes in the home, occupation, community and congregation?
3. How do most of the members view the use of the abilities and talents for God's purposes in the home, occupation, community and congregation?
4. How do most of the members view the use of money and its relationship to their spiritual life?

### Discussion Questions:

- What do the above ideas suggest about your congregation?
- Considering your answers to the above questions, how could you—as congregation leaders—help congregation members in their spiritual journey as stewards?
- What specific steps should the congregation take to address each of the issues identified?

**PRODUCTS** are what Paul Hiebert calls the physical artifacts created by a culture, such as fashion, literature, poetry and so forth. What are some of the concrete outcomes in the areas identified below:

1. **Communication:** How does the congregation communicate its purpose and mission? (What avenues and tools are employed in getting the message to every member?)
2. **Service:** How is the congregation doing when it comes to identifying, recruiting and training people to serve in various positions in the church?
3. **Offerings:** How is the congregation doing when it comes to financially supporting the work of the local church and supporting the wider mission of the district and Synod?
4. **Gifts:** How does the congregation help members identify and use the gifts God gives to His people?

### Discussion Questions:

- What do the above products suggest about your congregation?
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- What specific steps should the congregation take to address each of the issues identified?



**FAITH AFLAME**  
*God's Steward*

**Faith Aflame: 360 Degree Stewardship**  
Stewardship@lcms.org

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[www.stewardshipadvisors.com](http://www.stewardshipadvisors.com)

**Consecrated Stewards**  
[www.lcef.org](http://www.lcef.org)

This newsletter is provided by DCS Stewardship Ministry of LCMS District and Congregational Services. Rev. Wayne J. Knolhoff, Director (314) 996-1720

**RESOURCES:**

# BOOK CORNER

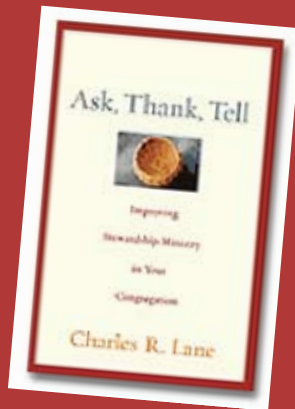
*Ask, Thank, Tell*  
by Charles R. Lane

A helpful book for congregational use in the area of Biblical stewardship is "Ask, Thank, Tell" by Charles R. Lane.

"The goal of our stewardship ministry," writes Lane, "is to help God's people grow in their relationship with Jesus through the use of the time, talents, and finances God has entrusted to them."

On the back cover, Jerry Hoffman, coordinator for "Stewardship in the 21st Century" writes, "'Ask, Thank, Tell' is a straightforward, easy-to-read stewardship guide that ought to be placed in the hands of every seminarian, pastor, and congregation leader. Lange gives biblically grounded practical advice that, if followed, would transform the church."

A study guide for the book can be located on the internet at <http://archive.elca.org/stewardship/teaching.html>



## Stewardship Question:

### "Just what is a Christian steward?"

A Christian steward is a child of God who desires to serve God faithfully in all areas of life. St. Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 4:2, "Now it is required that those who have been given a trust must prove faithful" (NIV).

A steward is a child of God who realizes his/her role in life as a partner, a trustee, a manager, a caretaker or temporary custodian of gifts that belong to God. The Christian steward *receives* God's precious gifts gratefully, *manages* God's precious gifts carefully and responsibly, *shares* God's precious gifts with others generously, and *returns* God's precious gifts joyfully with increase.

Carl W. Berner, in his book *Spiritual Power for Your Congregation*, wrote, "The person whose love for Christ is kindled from the high altar of Calvary and whose spirit has been set on fire by the Holy Ghost will say: 'He loved me and gave Himself for me, and now I will love Him and give to Him every fiber of my being . . . Because every act of life involves the use of talents given of God and redeemed by Christ, stewardship is really as wide as life itself. We have been freed from the darkness of death and the strong chains of hell by the Savior Jesus Christ. Now God says to us: 'You are not your own,' and this is the heartbeat of Christian stewardship. Christ has bought me for Himself, and I shall place myself gladly under His management. He came my way; now I will go His way."

The faithful Christian steward will want to worship and serve God with all the talents, abilities, and gifts God entrusts to him/her.

## FROM THE

# *Stewardship Files*

The following paragraph comes from "A Theological Statement Concerning Christian Stewardship" written by Roy. H. Bleich in 1984.

*It is indeed a high honor and a great privilege to be God's representative to the world. It is part of God's plan of salvation to reveal His love, care and concern for the world through the lives of His sons and daughters. The individual Christian is consciously to live every moment, speak every word and perform every act for the purpose of glorifying God and serving others in such a way that God thereby builds His kingdom in the hearts and minds of people. The object of our life, of all stewardship activity, therefore, is to use the resources God has entrusted in such a way that people come to know and trust in the only true God.*

## DISCLAIMER STATEMENT:

Part of the mission of District and Congregational Services (DCS) is networking resources for our partners in ministry. All resources on our Web site with stock numbers beginning with "S" and resources published by Concordia Publishing House (CPH) have passed doctrinal review. Additional resources are recommended from time to time with the confidence that our professional church workers are trained to discern what is useful and proper for Lutheran churches and schools.

# BACK PAGE *Bible Study*

## Biblical Stewardship . . .

### I. Stewardship recognizes that God is the owner of all things.

Why is the plea to “give your life to God” wrong?

**Answer:**

Our life is not ours to give. We cannot give something that doesn't belong to us in the first place.

**Read the following:**

- Genesis 1:1
- 1 Chronicles 29:14
- Psalm 24:1-2
- Luke 12:42-48
- Ephesians 2:1-5

What do each of the above passages have to say about God's ownership?

### II. We are stewards entrusted with caring for that which belongs to God.

Why can't one be an owner and a steward?

**Answer:**

By definition a steward is one who manages what belongs to another. You cannot be both an owner and a steward.

**Read the following:**

- Matthew 25:14-20
- Luke 19:12-27

What does the parable recorded in the two Gospels above say about the steward's responsibility?

### A PLACE TO BEGIN

*A steward stands in a right relationship with God not because of what the steward does, but because of what God has done for the steward in Christ.*  
**Ephesians 2:8-10**

### CHRISTIAN STEWARDSHIP

*Stewardship is the recognition and fulfillment of personal privilege and responsibility for the administration of the whole life in accordance with the will of God.*  
**Abiding Word**

### III. Stewards are accountable to God.

Someone made the following observation about the Christian church: “We have produced disciples who do not mind taking up their cross, so long as it is not too heavy, fits into their schedule and does not conflict with their lifestyle.”

Do you agree with his assessment? Why or why not?

**Read the following:**

- Matthew 16:27
- Romans 14:12

According to the above passages, what are we accountable for?

## More Biblical Stewardship . . .

### IV. Stewardship is to serve God's purposes NOT our own.

- 1 Corinthians 6:19-20
- 1 Corinthians 7:23

### V. We are stewards of the spiritual and the material.

- 1 Corinthians 4:1
- Ephesians 5:15-16

### VI. A Christian steward cannot serve both God and money.

- Luke 16:13
- 1 Timothy 6:10



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