

MISSION — STEW



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SOUTHERN DISTRICT – LCMS

Coping with the Summer Slump / Looking for the Harvest

Anxiety grows for congregations as they approach summer in anticipation of a slump in attendance and giving! We know that persons take vacations and often do not attend church as regularly during the summer. It's important that we keep our eyes on the Lord even as we cope with downturns in attendance and/or giving. The story of Elijah as recorded in 1 Kings 17 comes to mind as Elijah was guided by God to go to Zarephath. When he came to the town gate, a widow was there gathering sticks. He called to her and asked, "Would you bring me a little water in a jar so I may have a drink?" As she was going to get it, he called, "And bring me, please, a piece of bread." "As surely as the LORD your God lives," she replied, "I

don't have any bread—only a handful of flour in a jar and a little oil in a jug. I am gathering a few sticks to take home and make a meal for myself and my son, that we may eat it—and die." Elijah said to her, "Don't be afraid. Go home and do as you have said. But first make a small cake of bread for me from what you have and bring it to me, and then make something for yourself and your son. For this is what the LORD, the God of Israel, says: 'The jar of flour will not be used up and the jug of oil will not run dry until the day the LORD gives rain on the land.'

Are we ready to trust God in the tough times to provide for our needs — individually and as

a congregation? The challenge is for us to be forward-looking and trusting God to lead and to provide.

Let's take a look at the words of Jesus in John 4: "My food," said Jesus, "is to do the will of Him who sent me and to finish His work. Do you not say, 'Four months more and then the harvest'? I tell you, open your eyes and look at the fields! They are ripe for harvest.....I sent you to reap what you have not worked for. Others have done the hard work, and you have reaped the benefits of their labor." Let's be willing to look at the fields in our communities and what harvest God has been at work to prepare for our claiming. The fields are ripe where your church is planted! Be bold and ready to step out!

Lutheran Schools — A Connecting Place!

We, as Lutherans, profess that God works through Word and Sacrament. The following is a testimony of the Spirit in action. We know that Lutheran schools are connecting places as persons come to know Jesus through the teaching of the Word of God.

Pastor Rory Hermann of Good Shepherd Lutheran in Gulf Breeze, FL on March 24 was privileged to baptize 13 students from among those that are enrolled in the school. Two more were baptized on April 18. Pastor

Hermann took the step by sending a letter to the school parents and letting parents know of the treasure of Baptism. The families were invited to attend a class and pastor provided instruction using Luther's Small Catechism as the course. Pastor Hermann contemplated an approach to serve families and was pleased to see how the families responded. We recognize that Baptism requires the ongoing action and support of families to nourish these children in the

Word. It is anticipated that the Good Shepherd congregation came to appreciate the new dimension and possibilities of having a Lutheran school as part of their ministry. We pray for the baptized children, families, and this congregation/school asking for God's ongoing protection on them since we know that Satan attacks where the Kingdom is growing. **(Good Shepherd Lutheran Church & School – Gulf Breeze, FL)**

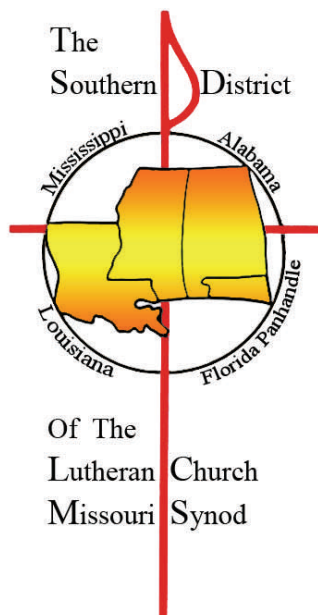
Highlight: ***Christian stewardship is the free and joyous activity of the child of God and God's family, the Church, in managing all of life and life's resources for God's purposes. Stewardship is a response to the Gospel as part of our Christian discipleship.***

Special points of interest:

- Lutheran Schools—Connecting Places
- Consecration Sunday—Stewardship Enhancement
- Growing Generous Givers

It's Time!

Engage ✕ Impact ✕ Transform
Jesus Boldly Advancing His Mission



"... as joyful servants of Christ and providing leadership for mission and ministry, ours is the privilege to encourage and affirm, equip and enable, administer and coordinate."

Consecration Sunday is a stewardship enhancement tool that has been used by a number of district congregations. Participating congregations report giving increases of 10-20% or more. The key is it involves a number of people and keeps the focus on ***what percentage of my income is God asking me to contribute?***

We know that congregations on the average who receive tithes/offerings without a stewardship campaign will generally receive about 1.5% of the member's income. If a pledge is received, the giving increases to about 2.9% of the member income. Congregations who conduct a stewardship campaign and focus on the question posed above about percentage giving receive about 4.6% of the member income.

District congregations were surveyed in Fall 2009 on aspects related to stewardship. The results noted that only 44% of the congregations conduct an annual stewardship education program and only 54% use a pledge system. This would seem to indicate that congregations could benefit from use of Consecration Sunday or some other quality stewardship program. Call the Southern District Office for more information on available stewardship programs! There is something for churches of all sizes.

Healthy View of Stewardship - For many persons, stewardship is a dirty word. It is often connected with obligation and/or often tied to meeting a budget. Steward in the original biblical context focused on the Kingdom of God but we have let it become as a way to fund the church. The challenge is for the church to keep a mission focus and have a clear mission plan that regularly receives the attention of the leadership.

Congregations have also resorted to using fundraising approaches that work in the community rather than approaching it in a spiritual sense. Stewardship is a part of discipleship and is a spiritual matter. We have to overcome seeing that the congregation is funded as an institutional entity rather than a mission on the move.

There is a new thrust in stewardship to talk about creating generous givers and to give out of the generosity of one's heart. Persons respond when they see there is an opportunity or an invitation to participate. What are the opportunities in your congregation's mission and ministry that fuel generosity in the heart? The change in emphasis is from something we have to do to but something we get to do.

Go to the Southern District website and click on the **Ministries** tab and scroll down to click on **Stewardship** to learn more about the generosity concept.

SOUTHERN DISTRICT - LCMS

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St. John Lutheran – Hattiesburg, MS has been using "New Consecration Sunday" materials since 2006. The first year St. John experienced an increase of 27% in giving. The next year we saw an 11% increase. In 2008, a 9% increase was realized and in 2009, even in the midst of a severe recession with many of our families hurting financially we saw an increase of 6%. While the increased monies coming in have helped us to do more than ever in sharing the love of Jesus, the one thing that I truly give all glory to God for, is the spiritual growth of the congregation in all areas of their lives. I heartedly recommend the "New Consecration Sunday" materials to any congregation that wants to see their members grow in understanding that being a disciple of Jesus involves their entire lives. As a side note, be sure and follow the guidelines of "New Consecration Sunday" as they are written. (Dennis Rhoads — Pastor)

Stewardship Resources – A variety of resources are posted at the Southern District website at www.southernlcms.org. Let us know what else you would like to see at this site. The members of the Stewardship Committee desire to respond to any identified needs and are prepared to lead congregation/area workshops! We are bold to support the mission! Contact **Gene Menzel** at g.menzel@southernlcms.org.