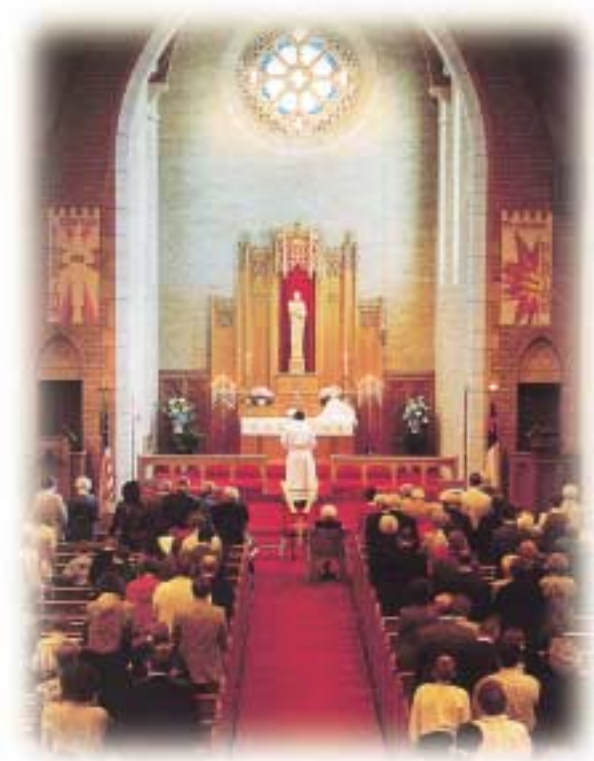




CONGREGATIONAL
STEWARDSHIP
WORKBOOK

Connecting Stewardship and Worship



Congregational Stewardship Workbook 2000

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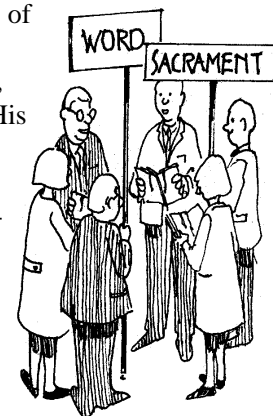
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The greatest opportunity to teach the principles of stewardship to members happens each Sunday. As people of God gather around Word and Sacrament, they also come together as a response to God for His gift of salvation. This response is the basis for the stewardship life.

Numerous opportunities for stewardship education present themselves in the worship service:

- the lectionary readings and texts,
- the form and text of the liturgy,
- the offering itself.



In bringing stewardship themes into worship it is important to remember that most worshipers will hear “money” when the subject is “being God’s stewards.” A deliberate emphasis will need to be made that connects stewardship with “all of life.”

Each day the worshiping congregation becomes more diverse. New members need to be fed the basics of stewardship. Long time servants need to be challenged to continual baptismal renewal and growth. Those worshipping in the congregation for the first time will need to be told that they are welcome and the congregation is glad they have joined the worship. Such statements only scratch the surface of the diversity of those gathered to worship. Connecting the Gospel with each individual is a challenge undertaken with fervent prayer for guidance of the Holy Spirit.

Stewardship Every Sunday

The three-year lectionary has a surprising variety of readings on broad and narrow stewardship themes. In fact, it would probably be more effective to work with those themes as they occur through the year rather than concentrate preaching on a short-term series of stewardship sermons.

Since the concepts of stewardship are so inherent in Scripture, making a stewardship application of one of the Sunday readings does not have to be “forced.” The pastor who looks at the readings with stewardship eyes will recognize this fact.

Helping members learn and practice stewardship is not accomplished simply by planning a once-a-year emphasis. A better approach is to incorporate and teach stewardship principles as a natural part of a Gospel response all year long. The sheer variety of preaching possibilities should not be surprising. Scripture has about 500 verses on faith, more than 500 on prayer but more than 2,000 on managing money and possessions. Regular preaching that incorporates stewardship themes demonstrates the whole counsel of God.

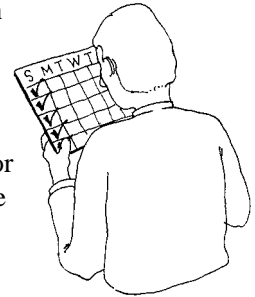
A common tradition has been to preach an annual fall series of stewardship sermons around the time of Thanksgiving, or in support of gathering financial pledges for the coming year. Many times, members harbor resentment or grow resistant to this plan, complaining that the church just wants to separate them from their money. If stewardship is equated only with a pledging process, this may be a legitimate observation.

Pastors often look forward to an annual stewardship sermon series with

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and of the Holy Spirit,” we are reminded of our Baptism into Christ—a baptism that not only washes away our sins but gives us the privilege of being about the Father’s business. We have been baptized into Christ so that we may be about the commission of bringing in others. In this work we are stewards of the Gospel.



- With the confession, we bring before God “what we have done and what we have left undone”—including managing all of life and life’s resources for God’s purposes. For this, too, we ask for and receive God’s gracious forgiveness.
- The kyrie invites the congregation to pray “for the peace of the whole world, the well-being of the church of God and for the unity of all “ By these words we are reminded of the worldwide nature of our stewarding. “This is the Feast” reminds us that “power, riches, wisdom and strength ... are his.” We have been made trustees, managers, of the things of God.
- The creeds confess the “maker of heaven and earth.” His ownership of all is of the essence of our faith. Luther’s explanations of the creeds’ articles contain exceptional stewardship language.
- The section of prayers is introduced with “Let us pray for the whole people of God and for all people according to their needs.” Again, we meet a wide scope of stewardship concerns.
- The two offertories are filled with images of fruitful vineyards and the abundant harvest, which are gathered to make a table that is the “foretaste of the feast to come.” We are invited to “offer the sacrifice of thanksgiving” in response to “all His benefits.”
- The Lord’s Prayer includes a petition for the necessities of daily life (daily bread) while acknowledging that the kingdom, power and glory belong to the One whom we ask, just as dear children ask a gracious Father.
- In the communion the body and blood of Christ are God’s gifts to His people empowering us for our stewardship tasks. In response to these gifts of God’s love we live to share faithfully His many blessings. What else can we do but “Thank the Lord and sing His praise,” telling everyone what He has done.
- As we leave the worship service to go about these tasks we part with a benediction.

Other services provide additional teaching opportunities:

- Holy Baptism reminds the faithful that we are reborn of water and the Spirit, and the newly baptized is given a lighted candle with the charge to “live always by the light of Christ.” The congregation prays that the newly baptized live “a godly life to the praise and honor of Your holy name.” The newly baptized is welcomed as a worker (read: steward) with us in the Kingdom of God. This theme is continued in confirmation

Notes

as if the worshiper places himself in the offering basket that is carried to the altar and dedicated to God's purposes. The worshiper confesses, as in the hymn, "Take my life and let it be consecrated Lord to Thee."

The Apology to the Augsburg Confession XXIV provides the theological foundation for this understanding of stewardship with its explanation of the sacrifice in the mass. In making the distinction between propitiatory and eucharistic sacrifice, the Apology approves the concept of eucharistic sacrifice, which, while not meriting forgiveness, is a way for the faithful to "give thanks or show their gratitude for the forgiveness of sins and other blessings received" (19). This eucharistic function of the offering serves as the connecting link between the Service of the Word and the Lord's Supper. If the offering is not part of worship, the bridge is missing.

Citing the Levitical sacrifices, the Apology approves the eucharistic sacrifices including the thank offering, the first fruits and the tithes (21).

[The six Bible studies in "Back to Basics in Giving-Sacrificial Giving" (see resources below) titled "Sacrificial Living and Giving" are excellent lessons on Old and New Testament views of sacrifice.]

Stewardship (managing all of life and life's resources for God's purposes) and Eucharist (the thankful gathering of the faithful around Word and Sacrament) come together in a dramatic manner as the elements are gathered for the communion. Some of the gifts, bread and wine, are immediately put to use in His service. Other gifts are reserved for other aspects of the church's mission. But gathering gifts in the offering symbolizes something far greater: the dedication to God of all of life and life's resources each and every waking moment.

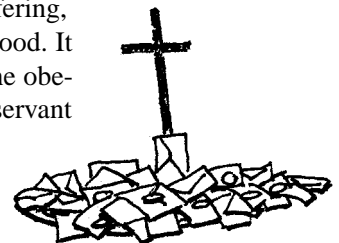
This understanding is captured in prayers spoken after the Offertory in many Lutheran churches:

Blessed are you, O Lord our God, maker of all things. Through Your goodness You have blessed us with these gifts. With them we offer ourselves to Your service and dedicate our lives to the care and redemption of all that You have made, for the sake of Him who gave Himself for us, Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Merciful Father, we offer with joy and thanksgiving what You have first given us—ourselves, our time, and our possessions, signs of Your gracious love. Receive them for the sake of Him who offered Himself for us, Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

It isn't just the money that is put into the basket and brought forward. Those gifts are but tokens of the offering of self to God's service. Eugene Brand summarizes his understanding in his article, "The Offering: Theory and Practice" in the anthology *Teaching and Preaching Stewardship*.

"The offering is such a symbolic action. The gifts are offered in token of our self-offering. With them we mean to lay ourselves upon God's altar, to be at God's service. The offering, then, responds to God with a pledge of servanthood. It is a symbolic gesture of surrender and thus of the obedient will. As God in Christ took the form of a servant and offered Jesus Christ for us, we respond to this gracious gift by offering ourselves to God. But what can one do for God? One can



Notes

- Stewardship prayers following the offering may lead into the prayer of the church. The steady drip, drip, drip of stewardship themes in prayers will have a positive effect over the long haul.
- Media—video clips will reinforce remembering messages about stewardship.
- Personal testimony about the grace of giving is a long accepted practice in worship.
- Volunteer recognition Sunday for all those who serve. A dinner may follow the service.
- Mark progress with building programs or fund drives with sung “doxologies” at milestones.
- Tell people in worship what happens because of generous offerings. Make sure the subjects are more than maintaining the system.
- New confirmands (including children) are given offering envelopes and the opportunity to make a giving commitment. Obtain and use “Spiritual Gifts Inventories” for Youth.
- With the great variety and diversity of people in our congregations the presentation of options and choices is important. Help people understand there is not one way to be God’s steward.



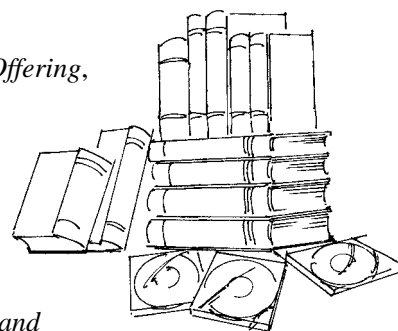
Resources

Hilbert J. Berger, *Now Concerning the Offering*, Discipleship Resources, Nashville, Tenn. 1987. An interesting collection of offertory sentences and brief stewardship prayers readily adapted for Lutheran settings.

William G. Carter ed., *Speaking of Stewardship, Model Sermons on Money and Possessions*, Geneva Press, Louisville, Ky. 1998. Carter’s introduction is the best part of this tool. The sermonic examples would profit from the application of the Law/Gospel paradigm.

Charles Cloughen Jr., *One Minute Stewardship Sermons*, Morehouse Publishing, Harrisburg Pa. 1997. A resource from an Episcopal source that is readily adapted for Lutheran settings. Good theory combined with practical examples.

Ray Miles, *Offering Meditations*, Chalice Press, St. Louis, 1997. A collection of sixty-nine brief meditations supplementing the Cloughen resource.



“Back to Basics in Giving-Sacrificial Giving” An annual emphasis for congregations. The six Bible studies highlight the connection between sacrifice, offering and worship. Stock number S21855, Concordia Publishing House, 800-325-3040.

“The Offering That We Bring” A two-hour stewardship presentation available from the Department of Stewardship Ministry, The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod Foundation. Call 800-325-7912 for information.

“Stewardship Every Sunday” Package. A 150-word stewardship application drawn from one of the assigned readings for each Sunday (and some additional days) in the A, B, C and Annual reading series. Comes with a Biblical index of readings for quick reference. Stock number S16053, Concordia Publishing House, 800-325-3040.

Stewardship Preaching Series A (1983) Series B (1984) Series C (1985), Augsburg Publishing House, Minneapolis. While the series is somewhat dated, it gives good examples for moving from liturgical texts to sermons.

“Divine Service I Narrative for Adults” and “Divine Service II Narrative for Children” Narrative Worship Service. Available from the LCMS Commission on Worship, 800-248-1930, ext. 1740.

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