

Stewardship Committee Discussions

Living Abundantly

Jesus said, "I have come that they may have life, and have it abundantly." (John 10:10b)

Twelve Stewardship Topics

The following topics are designed to provide the stewardship committee with a discussion period at the beginning of each meeting. Committees can use them in any order they desire.

Each topic includes a Bible passage and quotes from a stewardship resource.

The discussion guide also includes three discussion questions. Committees can discuss one, two, or all three of the questions depending on the time available.

Discussion One:	Stewardship Defined
Discussion Two:	Stewards Identified
Discussion Three:	Stewards or Owners
Discussion Four:	Generosity Encouraged
Discussion Five:	Change Needed
Discussion Six:	Stewards Confronted
Discussion Seven:	Committee on Purpose
Discussion Eight:	Money
Discussion Nine:	Becoming a Stewardship Parish
Discussion Ten:	Best Practices
Discussion Eleven:	Best Practices Part Two
Discussion Twelve:	Living Abundantly as God's Steward



Discussion Questions:

1. Why is it important to take time at the beginning of each meeting to discuss various stewardship topics?
2. How long can we spend at the beginning of our meetings to discuss these issues?
3. Which topics should we discuss and in what order?

Stewardship Truth:

Stewardship education is a vital aspect of congregational ministry.

Discussion One

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Stewardship Defined

Genesis 2:15 (ESV)

The LORD God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to work it and keep it.

The first thing God gave human beings to do after He created them was a stewardship task.

"Stewardship is a synonym for the life of a Christian who is living rightly within all of his relationships: before God as well as before his fellow creatures. Stewardship is the Christian life and the Christian life is stewardship." Dr. Joel Biermann

Three things to remember about stewardship:

1. Stewardship is not a technique, a program, or a law to obey. Stewardship is an attitude and a lifestyle.
2. Stewardship is the Abundant Life acted out in countless actions every day by each Christian and each congregation.
3. Christian Stewardship is a response to the love God has for us in Jesus Christ.

The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod definition of stewardship:

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



Discussion Questions:

1. How do most of the members of our congregation define stewardship?
2. Why is it so important to define stewardship as being about my whole life as a Child of God and not just about money?
3. Is the attitude toward stewardship in this congregation more positive or negative? Explain your answer.

Stewardship Truth: Stewardship is about my whole life as God's steward.

Discussion Two

Living Abundantly

Jesus said, "I have come that they may have life, and have it abundantly." (John 10:10b)

Stewards Identified

1 Peter 4:10 (ESV)

As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God's varied grace:

We are all stewards by birth. We are Christian stewards by Baptism.

"By definition, a steward is under the command of one who owns the resources that are to be stewarded. Steward is a title of a servant, one hired to undertake this activity on behalf of the owner." – R. Scott Rodin in *Stewards in the Kingdom*

Most churches make what Rodin calls a "classic false start" when it comes to stewardship. "Stewardship is the practice, the work, the vocation of a steward. It is the 'how to,' the ethical imperatives of the call to be a steward. The very term indicates that we can move past the whole discussion of what it means to be a steward and focus on the practice of stewardship. This is a false start."

"While we have produced a lot of resources for understanding what stewardship looks like, we have failed to raise up stewards," writes Rodin.



Discussion Questions:

1. What is the difference between a steward and a *Christian* steward?
2. How can our committee and our congregation keep from making the "classic false start" Rodin talks about?
3. How are we raising up stewards at every age level in the congregation?

Stewardship Truth: I am a Christian steward by God's grace.

Discussion Three

Living Abundantly

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Stewards or Owners

Psalm 24:1-2

The earth is the LORD's and the fullness thereof, the world and those who dwell therein,

*Everything belongs to the Lord. He is the **only** owner.*

"The biblical truth—that it all belongs to God—is the cornerstone of everything we have to say about stewardship." Charles Lane in *Ask, Thank, Tell*

"Looking more specifically at the Old Testament, we can say three things about the steward. First, the steward is not the owner (are you getting sick of hearing that yet?) Second, the steward has a position of high authority in the household of the owner and is given great responsibility. Third, the steward cares for the possessions of the owner both for the benefit of the owner and for the benefit of other people who depend on the owner for their wellbeing" writes Charles Lane.

Lane offers two cautions to Christian stewards:

1. Falling into the trap of thinking we own what we have.
2. Thinking that we deserve what we have because we have earned it by our own intelligence and hard work.



Discussion Questions:

1. Do you agree with Lane that God's ownership is the cornerstone of stewardship? Explain your answer.
2. Why is it so dangerous to think you are an owner or to act like an owner?
3. How can we as the stewardship committee help those who think they are owners to understand that they are stewards and that there is only one owner—God?

Stewardship Truth: God is the Owner and we are stewards.

Discussion Four

Living Abundantly

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Generosity Encouraged

1 Timothy 6:17-19

As for the rich in this present age, charge them not to be haughty, nor to set their hopes on the uncertainty of riches, but on God, who richly provides us with everything to enjoy. They are to do good, to be rich in good works, to be generous and ready to share, thus storing up treasure for themselves as a good foundation for the future, so that they may take hold of that which is truly life.

Encourage one another to do good works, to be generous, and to be ready to share.

God made the first move of generosity when He created the world and everything in it. His generosity continued when He sent His Son to suffer and die to take our sins away. His generosity is demonstrated to each of us when He calls us to be His own in Baptism and offers us forgiveness and life in Holy Communion.

"In the past, many churches looked to an annual stewardship sermon or an occasional capital funds appeal as a way of generating more giving. These types of events do have their place and can encourage a certain level of spiritual growth and development, but they tend to have a limited impact. They fail to effectively disciple people in the spiritual practice of generous giving and lack the power to foster a consistent spirit of generosity." Chris Willard and James Sheppard in *Contagious Generosity*



Discussion Questions:

1. Who are the rich in this present age?
2. What does it mean to be generous?
3. What are some things that keep us from being generous?
4. How do we as a congregation and as a committee disciple our members in the spiritual practice of generosity?

Stewardship Truth: Christian stewards are generous with all that God has entrusted to their care.

Discussion Five

Living Abundantly

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Change Needed

Romans 12:2

Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.

As the Christian steward examines his/her life in the light of God's Word change is often needed so that we do not conform to this world.

"The most common cause of failure in leadership is produced by treating adaptive challenges as if they were technical problems. What's the difference? While technical problems may be very complex and critically important, they have known solutions that can be implemented by current know-how. They can be resolved through the application of authoritative expertise and through the organization's current structures, procedures, and ways of doing things. Adaptive challenges can only be addressed through changes in people's priorities, beliefs, habits, and loyalties. Making progress requires going beyond any authoritative expertise to mobilize discovery, shedding certain entrenched ways, tolerating losses, and generating the new capacity to thrive anew." Ronald Heifetz, Alexander Grashow, and Marty Linsky in *The Practice of Adaptive Leadership*

Adaptive solutions require continuous learning.



Discussion Questions:

1. What is the biggest stewardship challenge our congregation faces?
2. Does that challenge require a technical solution or an adaptive solution or both? Explain.
3. How are we as a Stewardship Committee helping our members address their priorities, beliefs, habits and loyalties when it comes to Christian stewardship?

Stewardship Truth: Christian stewards desire to live in obedience to the will of God.

Discussion Six

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Stewards Confronted

2 Corinthians 9:7-8

The point is this: whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. Each one must give as he has decided in his heart, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that having all sufficiency in all things at all times, you may abound in every good work. As it is written, "He has distributed freely, he has given to the poor; his righteousness endures forever."

"Abundant reaping of stewardship fruits requires abundant sowing of the Word, which will produce growth...Because Christian stewardship is an educational process, it cannot be molded into one program which is set in motion for four weeks and then is finished for another year. The process proposes that we must first broaden understanding and increase learning on the part of all members before we can expect an increase in service and financial fruit." Waldo Werning in *Christian Stewards: Confronted and Committed*

"Confront" simply means "to bring face to face with." It does not have to be nor should it be harsh.

"It is a basic part of being a care-manager (steward) to be a confronter—faithful, wise, and responsible on God's behalf...We find that care-managing on God's behalf often involves bringing people face to face with reality, truth, hope, solutions, possibilities, injustices, issues, and even life itself. As such, the confronting role is at the heart of the idea of stewardship." Richard Rusboldt in *A Workbook on Biblical Stewardship*



Discussion Questions:

1. How has God's Word confronted you?
2. In what ways has God confronted your congregation to be more responsible Christian stewards? How has your congregation responded?
3. What are some ways we can challenge and confront members (lovingly) so they grow as faithful stewards?

Stewardship Truth: Christian stewards grow in the grace and knowledge of Jesus Christ.

Discussion Seven

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Committee on Purpose

2 Corinthians 8:6-7 (NIV)

So we urged Titus, since he had earlier made a beginning, to bring also to completion this act of grace on your part. But just as you excel in everything—in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in complete earnestness and in your love for us—see that you also excel in this grace of giving.

The LCMS Congregational Stewardship Workbook suggests that even mature Christians need help in their use of God's blessings and how they manage those blessings for the benefit of others. "Stewardship training, motivation and challenge must be ongoing in every congregation. Our continual encouragement is to grow in the grace of giving."

The Stewardship Committee has the task of training, motivating, and challenging members to be faithful stewards. To that end the purpose statement of the stewardship committee is important and gives direction to its work.

Charles Lane in *Ask, Thank, Tell* asks, "What is the mission (purpose) statement of your congregation's stewardship ministry? As your Stewardship Committee gathers to do its work, at what goal are you aiming? Let me suggest a goal for you to consider: **The goal of our stewardship ministry 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.**" (Emphasis added)



Discussion Questions:

1. How does our Stewardship Committee mission (purpose) statement compare to the one Lane suggests?
2. What stewardship training is ongoing in our congregation?
3. How are we helping our members "excel in this grace of giving?"

Stewardship Truth: Christian stewards grow in the grace of giving.

Discussion Eight

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Money

Luke 12:34

For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.

"Churches need to talk more about money and less about giving," said the pastor of a suburban congregation. He went on to explain his statement by saying that members of the congregation he served, for the most part, did not understand what the Bible has to say about money.

"People are looking to the church for answers when it comes to money and how we are to steward it, and we aren't helping them," he went on to say.

Martin Luther knew the importance of money. He wrote, "Mammon (i.e., money and possessions; (Matthew 6:24)...is the most common idol on earth. He who has money and possessions feels secure (Luke 12:16-21) and is joyful and undismayed as though he were sitting in the midst of Paradise. On the other hand, he who has no money doubts and is despondent, as though he knew of no God. For very few people can be found who are of good cheer and who neither mourn nor complain if they lack Mammon. This care and desire for money sticks and clings to our nature right up to the grave." Martin Luther, *The Large Catechism*, The First Commandment.

Money is an important aspect of our lives. It will be either a servant or a master. It makes a helpful servant but a terrible master. Jesus knew this and spoke about money and possession often. (See the verses preceding Luke 12:34 and many of Jesus' parables.)



Discussion Questions:

1. Tell why you agree or disagree with the pastor's statement about money.
2. What has the stewardship committee done to help members know what the Bible says about money?
3. Dave Ramsey says that 70% of Americans live pay check to pay check. They have no financial margin. How can our congregation help them?

Stewardship Truth: Christian stewards know that the money they have is entrusted to them by God to be used for His purposes.

Discussion Nine

Living Abundantly

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Becoming a Stewardship Parish

Philippians 2:4-5

Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others. Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus,

"As attractive as the concept of stewardship can be, it is often a tough sell in parishes when it is first introduced. Stewardship professionals caution that it takes at least five years for the concept of stewardship to take hold, and even then it must be regularly revisited as new parishioners move in and veteran parishioners need to be renewed." Charles Zech in *Best Practices in Parish Stewardship*.

Zech suggests that there are three phases in becoming a stewardship parish (at minimum it takes three to five years):

Phase One: parishioners encounter the notion of stewardship.

Phase Two: parishioners make stewardship choices, and based on those experiences, they seek to grow and develop a stewardship response.

Phase Three: parishioners become fully engaged in discernment and stewardship, growing into a stewardship-based lifestyle.



Discussion Questions:

1. What concept of stewardship has taken hold in our congregation?
2. How do we introduce our new members to stewardship and help them grow in this important ministry?
3. How do we regularly revisit the holistic nature of stewardship with our veteran members?

Stewardship Truth: Christian stewards regularly examine their own life of stewardship.

Discussion Ten

Living Abundantly

Jesus said, "I have come that they may have life, and have it abundantly." (John 10:10b)

Best Practices

Philippians 2:4-5

Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others. Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus,

A **best practice** is a technique or methodology that, through experience and research, has been proven to reliably lead to a desired result. Any practice or program a congregation establishes in the area of stewardship must be built on Biblical foundations. This foundation consists of three aspects. First, God is the owner. Second, I am a steward, I am not the owner. Third, as a steward I am accountable to the owner.

"Next to the pastor, it is generally believed that the most important factor in determining a successful stewardship effort in a parish is the parish stewardship council...The group charged with creating and maintaining stewardship in a parish should be considered more than a committee. It should rightly be viewed as one of the pastor's key advisory councils." Charles Zech in *Best Practices in Parish Stewardship*.

"If we want our parishioners to take stewardship seriously, if we really hope to achieve a conversion of minds and hearts, it is critical that the parish exhibit good stewardship in the way it spends its parishioners' contributions. Otherwise, what credibility does a pastor have when he preaches on stewardship? Charles Zech in *Best Practices in Parish Stewardship*



Discussion Questions:

1. How does our congregation view the Stewardship Committee?
2. What are some best practices we have as a stewardship committee?
3. How do we help our members see that our church practices good stewardship?

Stewardship Truth: Christian stewards understand the importance of stewardship in the lives of individuals in the congregation.

Discussion Eleven

Living Abundantly

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Best Practices Part Two

Philippians 2:4-5

Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others. Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus,

1. Be a welcoming parish that takes community building seriously. Zech suggests that a parish needs to be seen by members and by the surrounding community as a place where all people are welcome.
2. Appoint a stewardship council. The members of the council need to have a vision of where stewardship can take the parish, be comfortable talking about money, and recognize the importance of accountability.
3. Include stewardship as a vital component of the parish plan. It must be seen as integral to the life of the parish and not just a committee charged with meeting the budget.
4. Emphasize stewardship in all parish formation and education programs. Stewardship training must extend to all ages.
5. Provide the opportunity for lay witness presentations. Lay witness presentations by parishioners can have a powerful effect on other members of the congregation.
6. Encourage pledging by congregational members. Research indicates that churches that take offerings receive an average of 1.5% of income from members. Churches that receive a pledge of dollars receive 2.9% of income from members. Churches that ask for a percentage of income from members receive 4.6% of income.
7. Communicate with parishioners on stewardship. Use a variety of forms of communication to keep the members informed.
8. Remember that good stewardship for individuals starts with good corporate stewardship of the congregation.

From *Best Practices in Parish Stewardship* by Charles E. Zech



Discussion Questions:

1. Which of these best practices do you think our congregation does well? Explain.
2. Which of these best practices do you think our committee needs to work on?
3. What ways have we used to communicate stewardship truths to members of all ages?

Stewardship Truth: Christian stewards understand the importance of stewardship in the corporate life of the congregation.

Discussion Twelve

Living Abundantly

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Living Abundantly as God's Steward

Romans 6: 3-4

Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life.

We have been baptized! We belong to Christ!

God cares about how we live as His baptized children. We are to live such good lives that others see how we live and give glory to our Heavenly Father.

Christian stewardship is a way of life lived as a response to God's grace in Christ.

Christian Scharen makes the following comments *in Faith as a Way of Life*:

"Christian faith is a gift of God that entails dying to one way of life and rising to another lived not for ourselves, but for God."

"Christian faith, then, is God's gift, not just of salvation and new life, but of a whole new way of life 'in Christ.'"

"One of the most pressing needs... is to develop, sustain, and legitimize reflection on Christian faith not simply as a set of propositions to believe, commandments to obey, or rituals to perform, but as an orienting force that impacts every aspect of daily life.



Discussion Questions:

1. What are some ways stewards practice faith as a way of life?
2. What are some of the challenges that keep stewards from living in obedience to God's Word?
3. How can we as the stewardship committee help members reflect on their faith as an orienting force that impacts every aspect of daily life?

Stewardship Truth: Stewardship is the Christian life and the Christian life is stewardship.