



## Strengthening Ministry Networks

# Congregations can be joyful stewards of all God's gifts

Development leaders share their insights for growing stewardship

by Chelsea Ecklund, Communications Intern

In his sermon on stewardship, a pastor shared with the congregation that he feels much greater joy in watching his children open Christmas presents than he does in opening his own presents. A young Pastor Mark Anderson, who was listening, found that concept hard to believe until years later when he was a parent and felt the joy and energy of giving gifts to his own child.



Mark Anderson

"That joy of giving is how we should feel every time we're at the offering plate," says Anderson, assistant to the Bishop. "It's more exciting to use our money to save a child in Africa than it is to buy a cup of coffee."

As congregations of the Northeastern Iowa Synod begin stewardship campaigns and annual pledge drives this fall, parishioners will likely be reminded that all the things they have, already belong to God. "The point of stewardship is admitting that what we have isn't ours," Anderson says. "We're just taking care of it temporarily. We have been blessed and entrusted by God to

share what is God's in ways that will bring joy to others."

Anderson cites the three components of stewardship as time, talent and treasure. Time can be shared by volunteering within the congregation, such as helping with Sunday school or serving meals. Someone with musical talent may play piano for a special gathering or sing a solo for worship service. Treasures are shared through worship offerings and donations to mission projects.

"It's relatively easy to find people willing to engage their time and talents to the mission of the church, but it's hard for a lot of people to part with their treasure," Anderson says.

Professional development leaders would add a fourth component to stewardship—saying thank you. Don Meyer, Wartburg College's director of Development, believes that thanking people more often for their service, their presence and their gifts is the basis of stewardship.

"When you talk about stewardship in church, people think, 'Oh, that's about giving money,'" Meyer says. "In the college setting, it's about connecting and thanking people for their gifts."

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Keith Christensen, vice president for Development at Luther College, echoed Meyer's sentiments, saying he doesn't see stewardship as an effort, but rather as part of a process. "You identify prospects, involve them, engage them with what's going on at the college, and then solicit them for donations.

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After solicitation is stewardship, which is the thanking process.”

With a collective 55 years working in development between them, both

Christensen and Meyer are experienced in how to approach financial stewardship for their colleges and for their congregations. Meyer has recently been involved in a capital



Don Meyer

campaign to fund a new building addition for his home church of St. Paul's in Waverly. He has noticed that people are willing to give more money when prompted to do so. Members of the congregation are asked to donate to the capital campaign, and then they are asked to increase their annual giving, as well.

“In the spirit of giving, many people increase their donations without hesitation because they are asked,” Meyer says. “In church we're shy about asking for money because people don't like to talk about it. We in development can be bolder in

asking for money, but we have to be sure to tell those donating what the money will do.”

According to Anderson, the face value of a donation is much greater than people may realize. A gift to the offering plate is really putting scriptures into the hands of children to grow their faith. A half-hour spent reading with a child can help that child develop a life-long love for learning. An inspirational hymn shared as a solo can touch someone in a way that a sermon may not. Gifts to a clothing shelter can help a child be more confident at school or prepare an adult for an employment opportunity.

## ON-LINE STEWARDSHIP RESOURCES

The ELCA website has dozens of educational programs, publications, DVDs, templates, activities and other resources to help congregations grow in stewardship. Here are a few examples of what can be found at [www.elca.org/stewardship](http://www.elca.org/stewardship).

### Make It Simple

The Make It Simple educational program features four themes—Following Jesus, Facing the Truth, Acting Together, Sharing Enough—to help congregations grow healthy stewardship ministries. Congregations can learn how to form a stewardship team and develop hands-on mini-workshops, family retreats, themed meals, games for children, and more.

### Competencies

The Competencies web page lists attributes, such as being engaging and having a holistic perspective, to look for in potential steward leaders and offers tools for leadership development.

### Getting Started

Eight resources found on the Getting Started page can help congregations get started with stewardship ministry. Publications include *How to Improve Financial Stewardship*, *Money Leadership for Thriving Congregations*, and *Stewardship in the Small Membership Rural Congregation*, geared for congregations with an average attendance fewer than 100 members.

### Congregational Survey & Sermon Starters

This free, 10-minute online survey offers congregations valuable baseline information on what steps to take with year-round stewardship ministries. The web page also offers new scriptural sermon starters each week.

“Our gifts can let people who are going through tough times know that there are Christians who care about them,” Anderson says. “They can gain a new outlook when they learn they are not alone or forgotten.”



Keith Christensen

Christensen says that strategic planning has been key to the success of comprehensive campaigns at Luther College, and is just as important for congregations. A good plan should tie into the organization's mission and should identify how, what and why the specific project is important to the organization and is worth supporting.

“It is also important to identify who is being served by the organization

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and the project,” Christensen explains. “Plans can have both short and long-term horizons, so it helps to be clear about the timelines, needs, and goals. Once this plan is established, share it. Don’t be shy, you want people to know you are planning to be around for a long time and to be successful—with their help, of course.”

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—Pastor Mark Anderson

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Anderson adds, “One thing we know doesn’t work in stewardship is to not talk about it. A close second is talking about it only once a year.”

Whether a congregation is trying to increase year-round giving among its members, grow its mission support, or complete a capital campaign, Meyer says a stewardship campaign needs to include a compelling story detailing where the money will go, strong marketing materials to promote the campaign and, most importantly, pastors who can light the fire in congregational members to participate.

“If the congregation senses the pastor isn’t behind the campaign, the congregation won’t get behind it,” Meyer says. “If the pastor isn’t comfortable championing for donations, a strong lay leader in the church needs to take on that role.”

Christensen says there has been a shift in donors’ giving patterns to colleges and other organizations over time, “In 28 years in the field,

I have seen the shift from most people willing to give in general to an organization, to more interest in supporting specific causes or projects within the organization.”

When it comes to promotion, Meyer suggests engaging top givers to motivate other congregation members to donate. Have volunteers make phone calls to ask for donations. Include pictures in promotional materials to depict the mission of the campaign being carried out. Once donations have been collected, thank the givers and ask to publish their names in future promotional materials.

“It’s funny,” jokes Meyer. “They’ll all say, ‘Noooo, I don’t need it, that’s not why I give,’ but they love to see their names published. Give them that recognition.”

Anderson suggests that leaders thank their parishioners often and thank the entire congregation through all available communication platforms, such as the church newsletter, website, Facebook page and other media. Most importantly, he encourages congregations to engage givers in the missions they are supporting. Rather than have donors bring food to the church to give to the shelter, Anderson suggests that congregations encourage families to take their food donations directly to the shelter so they can connect in person with the ministry.

“Take confirmation classes, church councils, women’s groups and other congregational groups to visit the Bremwood campus, college campus, synod office or other ministries to see first-hand how their gifts are being used,” he says. “We are always excited and happy for people on

field trips to visit the synod office.”

Congregations can find numerous stewardship resources online at the synod website and at the ELCA website (see box, page 2). Representatives from the Mission Investment Fund can offer free consultations for building campaigns. In addition, Christensen and Meyer say that many professionals in the field of development often consult with congregations free-of-charge because they want to give back.

“To grow in faith is to know about the ministries we are financial partners with, locally and globally,” Anderson adds. “The Malaria Campaign is an example of our witness in saving the lives of small children in sub-Saharan Africa. It makes us really joyful to be able to do that.”

For more information, visit [www.elca.org/stewardship](http://www.elca.org/stewardship). Follow your gifts in action on the synod Facebook page, [www.facebook.com/neiasynod](http://www.facebook.com/neiasynod), and on Twitter, <https://twitter.com/neio-wasynodelca>.

## Sept. 30 deadline for Health Assessments

ELCA-primary health plan members and spouses can still earn \$150 for out-of-pocket medical expenses by taking the Mayo Clinic Health Assessment by Sept. 30. Follow-up activities must be completed by Nov. 30 to earn an additional \$350 in wellness credit.

Visit [www.myPortico.PorticoBenefits.org](http://www.myPortico.PorticoBenefits.org).