

## **THE PRACTICE OF STEWARDSHIP: *A SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINE IN RESPONSE TO GOD'S GRACE***

The practice of stewardship begins with hearing the Good News of Jesus Christ. It is the power of the Holy Spirit working through Word and Sacrament that changes our hearts and wills so that we become the generous children of God.

The practice of stewardship continues by providing opportunities for people to live out their faithful and joyful response to the Good News of Jesus. Stewardship is everything that we do after we say, "I believe".

The practice of stewardship involves the way we speak of Jesus and our faith. Paul says that we are "stewards of the mysteries of God" which have been revealed in Jesus. As good stewards of the Good News of Jesus we speak confidently, yet humbly, of what Jesus has done for the world and for us. Our participation in worship and the Eucharist "proclaims the death of Jesus until he comes again".

The practice of stewardship involves the way we devote our time and energy in daily life to God by serving others. As we are faithful in our vocations (family, citizen, job, member of a congregation, friend, etc.), we serve God with our activities of daily living, some of which occur within the congregation, but most of which occur outside of our congregation.

The practice of stewardship involves the way we care for the earth. As people who share in dominion over the earth, we exercise responsible and careful management of the earth's resources. We value the creation not only for its usefulness to us, but also for God's evaluation that it is "very good".

The practice of stewardship involves the way we manage our financial resources. As people who have received all things as gifts from God, including personal talents, skills, interests, and the ability and desire to develop these, we share a portion of what we have been given with others. Proportionate giving has been the Biblical way of determining how much we are going to faithfully manage for the benefit of our own lives and how much we are going to faithfully and generously give away for the benefit of others and the proclamation of the Good News of Jesus. We seek to grow in giving to and through the tithe (10% of our income).

### **TAKING THE LEAD IN GROWING GOOD FINANCIAL STEWARDS**

Confident and committed leadership is necessary to inspire people to grow in the spiritual discipline of financial stewardship. **All growth in stewardship is inspired, not demanded.**

The congregation inspires its members by being committed, joyful proportionate givers of its own financial resources. If the congregation will not trust that God will provide what is needed even if it gives away a significant portion of its own financial resources, most members of the congregation will not trust God enough to give away a growing portion of their own personal financial resources.

Pastoral and lay leadership in the congregation inspires the members and others who worship with them to grow in financial stewardship by talking about their own practice of stewardship and how it relates to their faith in the Good News of Jesus. People in the congregation will rarely grow to give more than the leaders of the congregation.

Mission interpretation will inspire people in the congregation to trust, not only God, but also, the effective management of the congregation to turn their gifts into ministry. Most people need to hear of the varieties of ministries that are provided by God through the congregation and the effects of those ministries on people. Likewise, people need to hear about the ministry provided by the Synod and Churchwide expressions of the church in order to believe that these people can also be trusted with their gifts for ministry. Mission interpretation enables people to express their generous hearts and wills through the ministry of the church in good confidence.

Pastoral and lay leadership inspire people in the congregation to be thoughtful and prayerful in their decisions to give by being enthusiastic supporters of an annual opportunity for Christians to commit themselves to a disciplined level of giving. Each year people are given a chance to deliberate, in the context of God's gracious gifts to them, about the amount they will return to God for ministry through the church. Such a stewardship emphasis focuses on the need of the giver to give rather than on the need of the church to receive to "meet a budget". The people of God want to give to God; but they often need a specified period of time to remember to be thoughtful and prayerful as they consider making an estimate of what they intend to return to God for ministry through the church.