



# StewardCAST



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## Key Elements of a Generous church

Generosity is a characteristic of the Christian steward and the Christian congregation. St. Paul encourages generosity when he writes in his first letter to Timothy, “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” (1 Timothy 6:17–19 ESV).

“Way too often,” writes Ken Sloane in an article titled *Unleashing the Generosity of Our People*, “we begin the stewardship conversation with what the church needs: more money, more tithers, a new roof on the Sunday school wing, etc. All of these may be true, but if the conversation remains locked on the church’s needs, eventually we’ll find ourselves ‘begging’ our people for money so often that they will literally walk by on the other side of the street to avoid us.”

Needs based giving trains church members to give when a need becomes evident rather than giving generously and regularly as a response to God’s grace in Christ. There are times and circumstances when it is necessary to enumerate needs, however, when that becomes the primary way of encouraging giving the result is often what is described above.

Sloane suggests that there are five key elements (or best practices) that are found in churches that have shifted the focus from a needs based approach to nurturing stewards to be generous. Those five elements are:

### 1. Self-Examination.

“We are part of a culture that has, in many ways, lost our vision of the difference between wants and needs. We have tasted the sweetness of immediate gratification and it has become the staple that we want on our table all the time. We haven’t wanted to save for something when we could charge it and enjoy it immediately,” writes Sloane.

The pastor, as Chief Steward, will be the first to examine his own life and his attitude toward money and possessions in the light of God’s Word. As the spiritual leader of the congregation, he will also help members see the importance of distinguishing between needs and wants. The Scriptures have a great deal to say about money, finances, and earthly possessions. The Christian steward should be educated in

how to manage resources to the glory of God. If the church doesn’t do this, the world will.

Sloane offers the following Action Step to encourage self-examination:

Offer a basic money management course for all members of the congregation beginning with the leaders.

### 2. First Fruits Teaching.

Biblical stewardship forces people to rethink their priorities—not just their priorities when it comes to money, but priorities in every area of their lives. Congregations who take seriously their stewardship task ask members to think differently about what is important in their lives and how their stewardship shows their priorities.

We understand from Scripture that everything is the Lord’s. (See Ps. 24:1–2.) If everything is the Lord’s then we are stewards of that which belongs to God. Affirming that relationship is important. That’s where firstfruit giving comes in. Giving to God first serves as an ongoing reminder to His children that they are to trust Him and acknowledge His ownership of all. Proverbs 3:9 underscores this fact. “Honor the Lord with your wealth and with the firstfruits of all your produce.”

Sloane offers the following Action Step to encourage first fruit giving:

Use teaching opportunities to start conversations around the priority decisions we make all the time. Use questions like:

- If a fire was moving toward your home and you had just a few minutes to fill just one box, what would you take?
- Imagine looking into that box: What does this say about what is important in my life?
- Imagine looking at a list of what you have spent money on in the past six months: What does this say about what is important to me?

### 3. Personal Witness.

One of the goals of an intentional stewardship process in the congregation is to change the stewardship culture from a view of stewardship that is mainly about finances to a view that encompasses all of life. Anthony Robinson writes in *Changing the Conversation*, “Changing the culture

of organizations, groups, and institutions — and even societies — is about changing the conversation...One might understand the Christian faith itself as, in important ways, an ongoing effort at changing the conversation and thus changing the way we understand our lives and the way we live in the world. In the sacrament of baptism we name and rename a child or an adult as ‘a child of God, a disciple of Christ, and a member of the church.’ During Lent and Easter we reframe loss and defeat as God’s strange way of victory and hope. When we are asked to offer our gifts to God in the practice of offering, we are invited to set aside the dominant languages of consumerism and scarcity and to discover ourselves within a complex narrative of receiving, giving, and abundance” (page 1).

Leaders are the keepers of the culture and how they talk about the concepts of “steward” and “stewardship” will impact the stewardship culture of the congregation. Conversing about generous and joyful stewardship among leaders is an important place to begin. Giving leaders, starting with the Chief Steward, the opportunity to talk about their stewardship journey (personal witness) in various settings will set the stage for further conversations.

The following Action Step can encourage personal witness:

Use Stewardship Life Devotions with leaders of the congregation to encourage conversation about stewardship issues. The devotions are located online at [faithaflame.lcms.org](http://faithaflame.lcms.org)

#### 4. Clear Vision for Mission.

“Churches that are known for the generosity of their people are consistently ones that have a clear sense of their mission, in their community and the world; that mission is not just known by a few leaders, but throughout the church family... How about your congregation? Is the mission of your local church well known by your people? More importantly, is it more than just words on the bulletin, is it something to which your church focuses its energy? Do you fulfill it well enough that people can see you do and would be willing to give generously to support that mission?” writes Sloane.

“Another way to put this,” writes Anthony Robinson in *Stewardship for Vital Congregations*, “is that stewardship is not separate from the overall and ongoing life of the congregation. If the congregation has a strong sense of purpose and identity, if there is enthusiasm for that mission, if the various aspects of the congregation’s life (worship, education or formation, outreach) are informed by that sense of purpose, then stewardship has a strong foundation upon which to build. If, on the other hand, a congregation has little or no clear sense of purpose or mission, if there is little capacity to articulate purpose, if other aspects of the life of the church are in maintenance mode, then it’s difficult to suddenly light



a fire for stewardship. Michael Durall, in his fine book *Creating Congregations of Generous People*, made this point clearly: ‘You cannot take a congregation that is somnolent for eleven months of the year and make members wildly enthusiastic about giving during the twelfth’ ” (page 23).

Sloane offers the following Action Step to encourage first fruit giving:

Set aside a Saturday for church leaders to gather to work on your church’s mission statement. If you already have a statement, ask these three key questions:

1. Is it relevant to who we are and who we strive to be?
2. Is it clear and concise so that everyone in the church could be expected to know it and be able to repeat it?
3. Is it in line with what Jesus would have us do? After all, it is not our church it is His.

#### 5. Clear Expectations of Members

In the *Lutheran Service Book Agenda* (pages 32–33) there is a rite for the Reception of Members by Transfer or Profession of Faith. That rite gives clear expectations for membership in the Christian congregation. These expectations are identified by the following questions:

- Do you intend to hear the Word of God and receive the Lord’s Supper faithfully?
- Do you intend to live according to the Word of God, and in faith, word, and deed to remain true to God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, even to death?
- Do you intend to continue steadfast in this confession and Church and to suffer all, even death, rather than fall away from it?
- Will you support the work our gracious Lord has given this congregation with your prayers and the gifts God has given you?

It would be helpful for members to review the above expectations regularly to be reminded of their responsibilities as members of Christ's Church.

The following Action Step can help members review expectations:

Work through an annual steward renewal process with all members of the congregation. One example of such a process can be obtained by requesting a copy at [stewardship@lcms.org](mailto:stewardship@lcms.org)

## Resources

Stewardship resources to encourage generosity in the congregation are located at [faithaflame.lcms.org](http://faithaflame.lcms.org) and [lcms.org/stewardship](http://lcms.org/stewardship).

**Check out the LCMS Online Store for Additional Stewardship Resources ■ [www.lcms.org](http://www.lcms.org)**

To get to the LCMS Online Store go to [www.lcms.org](http://www.lcms.org) and click on the "Resources" tab. The Online Store tab is on the lower right side of the "Resources" window.

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## StewardCAST

*StewardCAST is a monthly stewardship resource provided by Stewardship Ministry of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod. Rev. Wayne J. Knolhoff is the Director of Stewardship Ministry. He can be reached at [wayne.knolhoff@lcms.org](mailto:wayne.knolhoff@lcms.org)*

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