

## Newsletter Articles

*It may be good to make these available along with the congregational newsletter, the ELCA's, "Making Christ Known" in order to give the congregation a feel for some of the many things in which their church is involved.*

*These are newsletter articles. Choose three for the three months before the campaign and three for following it. The numbering has no purpose other than to aid in keeping order, although numbers 4 and 5 would be best used just before the "Celebrate Generosity" program.*

### **1) The Order of the Cross**

Early in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Frederick William III the king of Prussia was in financial difficulty. After a lot of thought, he decided to ask the women of Prussia to donate their gold jewelry to be melted down and made into money for their country. In exchange for each gold ornament, he gave each woman an iron decoration of his gratitude. Each decoration had written on it, "I gave gold for Iron, 1813."

There was a huge response. In fact, the women very much prized their gifts from the king even more than the gold jewelry they used to own. The reason is obvious. The iron decorations were proof that these women had sacrificed for their king and country. It even became unfashionable for women to wear jewelry, and the Order of the iron Cross was begun. Members of this order wore no jewelry except for a cross of iron.

Stephen Olford once wrote about this story, "The Church today needs an army of people who are so committed to the King of Kings that sacrifice becomes a way of life...recruits for this army should be known as members of the Order of the Cross of Christ because they have experienced the grace of giving."

### **2) What percentage did you say?: How well does the Church use its income compared to others programs?**

(Eugene Grimm)

I just hung up the phone from another of those fundraising organizations. This one was raising money for needy kids for a fine organization. When the caller identified himself and told me what my gift would go for, I asked if he was a fundraiser or a member of the organization. He informed me that he was a fundraiser.

Next question: What percentage of what you raise actually goes to the organization for the needy children. Answer: about 10-15%. (Standard answer, by the way.) Next he tried to make the excuse that they have a lot of overhead. "Right!!!" Eighty-five percent overhead?

"I'm sorry," said I, "but I don't give to fundraising organizations that overcharge their clients." Actually those are NOT my exact words. I really WAS a bit more tactful.

I didn't tell this man that organizations like Lutheran World Hunger do their fundraising for about seven percent, but I could have. I didn't mention that when we Lutherans send a dollar to our disaster relief program, \$1.00 actually goes for disaster relief ... but maybe I should have. Ah, well, there will be a next time. There always is. Once in a while, depending on how talkative I feel, I even tell them what percent of my income I give through my church. Then I like to ask what percent they

give away to any and all causes, or what they are personally donating to the cause they are trying to get me to give to.

If you're like me you get two to four such calls a week. If you're like me, you give to very few because you're really giving to the fundraiser.

Moneys given for any benevolent cause are best given through our church. In fact, that's what I often tell fundraisers. Did you know that our church actually supports many of the causes the fundraisers are calling about? I mean in our ELCA (and almost every other denomination) you can find, in one form or another, most of the causes these folks represent.

Sometime back I decided rather than become annoyed with fundraisers, I'd simply have some fun. Admittedly, some of them are annoying. But after all, they are people too, and they're merely trying to make a living. Of course, if they get obnoxious, it's even more fun.

### **3) When Do We Begin to Teach Financial Stewardship?**

(adapted from Rev. Kurt Nordby)

When do we begin to teach stewardship? The answer, of course, is with our children. This emphasis upon teaching our children about stewardship can be one of the most important components of a congregation's stewardship ministry. All too often, however, this aspect of stewardship education can be overlooked. Let me underscore the importance of involving our children in stewardship ministry.

As we teach our children about stewardship, a foundation begins to form upon which they can build throughout all of life. Three basic principles provide this foundation.

First, all of us are gifted by God.

Second, stewardship is our joyful and thankful response to what God has done for us in Christ.

Third, a lifestyle of stewardship is a life long process.

Of course, these are basic principles for both children and adults in nurturing a sense of stewardship.

Let me suggest some objectives that you might consider in emphasizing stewardship education for children:

- 1.Promote in the congregation a sense of stewardship that includes both children and adults.
- 2.Involve children and youth in the stewardship ministry of the congregation.
- 3.Help children and youth understand WHY we give.
- 4.Help children and youth understand HOW we give, that stewardship is a lifestyle.
- 5.Be intentional in stewardship ministry by setting aside times to talk with children and youth about stewardship. An example of settings might include Sunday School, the children's sermon or children's time during worship, intergenerational stewardship events, confirmation programs, and

talk times in a youth program.

6) Parents can spend time over supper sometime and explain why and how the family contributes to the church and other charities.

Be creative and have fun in your stewardship education. Helping children understand lifestyle of stewardship is an essential aspect of their faith journey.

(Following is an item that could be published during the *Celebrate Generosity* program.)

#### **4) Growing Your Giving**

For many years now members have been encouraged to take the **Growth Giving Challenge** - to grow in their giving by one percent annually as a reflection of their commitment to our Lord. We also encourage congregations to set the example for their members by growing in their giving to mission support beyond their congregation by one percent of their income.

But there are other ways to grow. Using the growth giving challenge, a member giving one percent, would take about nine more years to reach a tithe.

Some members, wanting to make a commitment to tithing, may consider that a bit too slow. One alternative suggestion would be to grow by \$1.00 per week (beyond your present level of giving) until you reach a tithe or a sacrificial gift you conscientiously believe is God's call for your lives. In other words, if you're currently giving \$50.00 per week through the mission and ministry of your congregation, next week you'd give \$51.00, the following week \$52.00 and so on. Few of us would miss the increase. In fact, most of us could find such a commitment rather easy .....at least until we reach a level close to a tithe or beyond.

Such a practice, followed faithfully every Sunday, including those when one is absent from worship, would net an increase in giving of \$1,378 per year, or an average increase of \$26.50 per week for the year. Thus, if your giving began the commitment period at \$50.00 per week, at the end of one year you would grow to \$102.00 per week. It would enable our members to reach a tithe of their income much faster than one percent per year. Indeed, starting from \$1.00 per week, in two short years, a member could reach a tithe on a \$50,000 income.

(The following article helps to explain the idea behind "estimate of giving cards.")

#### **5) Estimate of Giving Cards**

Stewardship is a lifestyle. It is "what we do after we say we believe." It is discipleship in action. We can say it a thousand ways, but every way we say it, stewardship boils down to our commitment to Jesus Christ.

Writing that commitment on a card also makes a difference. Wayne C. Barrett points out that congregations that use an estimate of giving card, members give twice as much as those who don't. In congregations where members estimate their giving based on a percentage of their income give three times as much as those who don't fill out a card. He points out that the phrase, "I'll give, but I won't commit" usually means, "I won't give much." There are exceptions of course. But those exceptions represent very few of our members.

Likewise, "I'll give, but I won't use an envelope" usually means "I won't give much." Yes,

there are tithers who decline to give by envelope because they don't want a record, but they are the exception.

Add up the loose offering your church receives in a year. Visit [www.elca.org](http://www.elca.org) to see if all the loose offering you receive in a year equals one tithe from your primary zip code.

### **But There's Another and Better Reason**

Growing in our giving helps us grow spiritually. The primary goal of doing a stewardship program is to help members grow spiritually. Even if there were no need to grow financially, growing in one's giving is a vehicle that helps members grow spiritually.

Growing in grace and knowledge of the truth is a goal for all Christians.

## **6) The “Cost” of an Offering**

King David had an amazing devotion to God; but he also had an amazing capacity to fall away from God at times. At one point, late in his reign, David ordered a census to be taken of the population of his kingdom. For reasons that are not clear from the Scriptures, this census was a sin against God. The Bible does not even hint at why this act aroused God's anger, but we may assume that the wrongness of the act was so obvious at the time that the biblical author did not think that he needed to explain it.

It was so obviously wrong that even David's top general, Joab, didn't want David to do it, but David ordered it done anyway.

Soon, a plague, which was understood as God's punishment for David's sin, killed 70,000 Israelites in three days. David was very sorry for his sin.

The prophet Gad came to David with God's word to him. David was to offer a sacrifice at the place where the angel of death stopped. That spot happened to be the farm of a man named Araunah.

Araunah was working at his threshing floor harvesting grain when David came to him and asked to buy the threshing floor in order to build an altar to the Lord. Araunah felt that it would be a great honor to serve the king and offered to give David not only the threshing floor, but also his oxen for the sacrifice and the threshing sleds and ox yoke for the firewood.

But David said, “No, but I will buy it from you for a price; I will not offer burnt offerings to the Lord my God which cost me nothing.”

This text speaks to us about honoring God. David could have accepted Araunah's generous offer, but in so doing he would have dishonored God and himself. The kingdom of God requires sacrificial devotion, and that can only be so when the gift costs the giver.

David knew that the sacrifice would have far less value and meaning if he offered to God something that belonged to another. It was meaningful only if it cost him. David knew something that Christians often overlook - that stewardship is an integral element of our living faith.

We live in a world where many people live their lives on the principle of how little they can get away with. Many people want as much salary as possible for a few hours of work as possible. The state lotteries and other kinds of gambling show that people have a great urge to win a large

amount for just a small investment.

A seven year old child of missionaries was surprised by the extreme poverty surrounding the little church they had recently been assigned to. The children next to him wore ragged clothing and no shoes. Yet when the offering plate was passed, child after child dropped a few coins in it. The missionaries' son turned to his mother and asked, "But why are they giving away money when they are so poor?"

David could have answered that boy's question - "I will not offer to the Lord my God that which has cost me nothing."

## **7) Spiritual good, material bad?**

There are many people who get impatient with the Church because they say it is always asking for money. There are two observations that could be made - one minor and one deeply spiritual.

The first is that if people gave money in proportion to the expenditures for non-essential things, the Church would have considerably more to work with than it does now. We all know that there are many who spend more for dinners, trips, clubs, in one year than they give to the church in many years.

The second observation is that it is a vicious untruth to say that spiritual things are good and that material things are evil, and that the church should not be concerned about material things such as money. Most of life is sacramental in its nature, and the outward and material is usually evidence of the spiritual reality on the inside. That material thing called money represents life. Someone has had to work so many hours to earn money for himself or for others. So when we spend money, we spend life.

When we give to the Church we are saying, "I will give so many ours of life each week in order that the work of Jesus Christ in His Church may go forward."

## **8) You work hard for the money, but...**

In the book, *Little House on the Prairie*, there is a chapter called "Independence Day." A hot and thirsty boy comes to his father during a Fourth of July fair to ask for a nickel for lemonade. His dad takes out a half-dollar and says, "Almanzo, do you know what this is?"

"Half a dollar," Almanzo answered.

"Yes. But do you know what a half a dollar is?"

Almanzo didn't know it was anything but a half a dollar. "It's work, son, that's what money is; it's hard work. You know how to raise potatoes, Almanzo?"

"Yes," Almanzo said.

"Say you have a seed potato in the spring, what do you do with it?"

"You cut it up," Almanzo said.

"Go on, son."

"Then you harrow - first you manure the field, and plow it. Then you harrow, and mark the

ground. And plant the potatoes, and plow them, and hoe them. You plow and hoe them twice.”

“That’s right, son. And then?”

“Then you dig them and put them down the cellar.”

“Yes, then you pick them over all winter; you throw out all the little ones and the rotten ones. Come spring, you load them up and haul them here to town, and you sell them.

And if you get a good price, son, how much do you get to show for all that work? How much do you get for half a bushel of potatoes?”

“Half a dollar,” Almanzo said.

“Yes,” said his father. “That’s what’s in this half dollar, Almanzo, the work that raised half a bushel of potatoes is in it.”

Almanzo looked at the round piece of money that his father held up. It looked small, compared with all that work.

“You can have it, Almanzo, it’s yours.” his father said as he handed the coin to his son. “You could buy a suckling pig with it, if you want to. You could raise a litter of pigs, worth four, five dollars apiece. Or you can trade that half-dollar for 10 lemonades, and drink it up. You do as you want, it’s your money.”

On the one hand Almanzo’s father was right - and it is a good reminder that money represents our work. A valuable lesson for people, especially the young. But thinking a bit more - maybe the money Almanzo’s father earned was not really his.

God owns the earth out of which the potatoes came. The potatoes were really God’s. Besides, God gave Almanzo and his family healthy bodies and good minds which enabled them to harvest the potatoes and market them. So, in the end they depended on God for whatever they possessed.

The story reminds us that money is simply another gift from God to us and that if the Christian has given body and soul to the Lord that automatically includes everything else (including the symbol of our work - money).

## **9) Yes, it is possible to give too much...**

A common refrain through Biblical stewardship programs is to, “Give as you prosper...” Martin Luther gave a sermon on Luke 19:1-10 that included this:

“God does not want you to give to needy people in such a way that you and yours must also beg and be a burden to other people. He only asks you to give of your abundance, of that which you can spare without harm. As Paul puts it: “I mean not that other men be eased and you be burdened” (2 Cor. 8:13). Your abundance, says he, should serve their want; in this way the situation is equitably handled. However, one should be careful not to follow the example of the world, whose eyes are always larger than its stomach, so that it only speaks of an abundance when it has many thousands of [dollars]. One, two, or three thousand are considered a trifle. Christians should not demand that much but should be satisfied with their daily bread and should help needy people with what is left.”

## 10) Benevolent gifts are sometimes misused

Someone complained to Martin Luther that his gifts were sometimes misused by those who received them. Later, Luther spoke about Abraham and the three mysterious strangers who visited him (Gen. 18:2-5):

“We should not doubt that Abraham often suffered what we are suffering every day. For lazy hypocrites, used to begging, are always with us... No doubt Abraham was often imposed upon by loafers who abused his generosity because they knew they would find their table spread by him and everything laid out. Such folk are like lazy drones who eat the honey of the bees that labor and are industrious. Yet their benefactors are not the worse for it, for those who practice generosity in all simplicity do not lose their reward even though their benefaction is lost. The fact of the matter is that if they are giving in the right spirit, they are serving Christ in the needy. Just as Abraham receives the Lord Himself as a Guest (in the Genesis story) without being aware of it, so we too, receive Christ Himself as a Guest, coming to us in His poor, when we do good to one of the lowliest of the kingdom of God.”

Nevertheless, Jesus told us in Matthew 10:16 “...*be wise as serpents, but innocent as doves...*”